

# observant

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Photo: Joey Roberts

## Less English?

“If you think the use of English is getting out of hand, you’re quickly dismissed as conservative”

The Dutch general election is coming up. High polling parties like VVD and Pieter Omtzigt’s NSC are advocating for bachelor’s programmes to be taught in Dutch again. Are UM students and staff concerned about this? **P. 5-8**

## Call cells



Hybrid working asks for silent compartments, call cells and hybrid meeting spaces. The Future of Working taskforce’s job is done, there is a final evaluation report. But there is still a wish list. **P. 3**

## Writing stories

A student of Health Sciences dreams of a long career as a fantasy author. For seven years, he worked on a detailed world with kingdoms, races, cities and ethnic groups, each with its own culture and history. “That’s quite extreme.” **P. 4**





editorial

# Significant consequences

**Riki Janssen**

We received a question from our counterparts in Groningen: would *Observant* like to participate in conducting a survey among international students and university staff in the Netherlands? The main question to be answered: do you still feel at home here in the face of growing criticism from political parties regarding the increase in international students and English-taught bachelor's programmes?

My initial reaction was positive. Yes, great, this is relevant to an article we're publishing this week – are UM students and staff concerned about the national election results as the call for Dutch-taught bachelor's programmes grows louder? It also ties into comments made during University Council meetings in the previous academic year, about international employees feeling increasingly out of place at UM because of the anti-internationalisation discourse. It

would be good to have data on that.

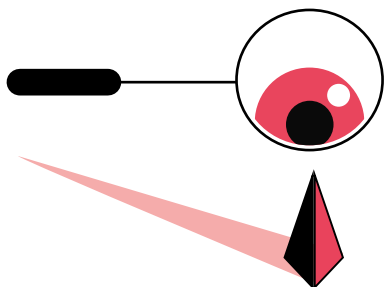
But my enthusiasm was short-lived. My colleague WD immediately and rightly wondered about the practicality. How would we manage to get this long list of questions answered by some 400 people (Groningen's target), within a two-week timeframe, knowing that both students and staff are quite tired of surveys?

We quickly agreed that it wouldn't be feasible to visit all UM buildings to find 400 international students and employees willing to fill in the survey. (UM regulations prevent *Observant* from sending a mass email asking people to participate, unlike our Groningen counterpart *Ukrant*.) Besides, we'd already decided on a different approach weeks ago. We've interviewed nine employees and students about this political debate, which could have significant consequences for UM. After all, what if Dutch

does have to become the main language of instruction in many bachelor's programmes? But while our interviewees have their concerns, the majority hope and expect that Maastricht will be granted exceptional status if the new government decides to crack down on the use of English in higher education.

We will report back to you once the results of the Groningen survey are in, just before 22 November. On that day, election day, one of our junior journalists will visit a polling station to interview a UM student issuing ballot papers and counting the votes in the evening. Just a lucrative side job, or more than that?

*Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the Observant office*



## splinters

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column.

Contributions: HOP, Dennis Vaendel, Simon Wirtz

### Digital intelligence

He had already been suspended, but now he has lost his job. Jasper Rekers, who wanted to become a member of Parliament on behalf of BBB, is no longer allowed to teach at the University of Applied Sciences Saxion because of his anonymous hateful tweets. He taught Digital Intelligence & Business at the institute.

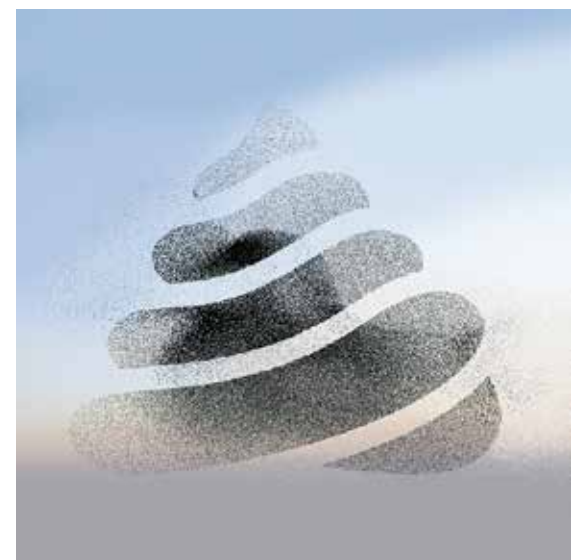
At the end of October, press agency ANP *divulged* that Rekers himself displayed dubious digital intelligence during the Covid pandemic. For two years, he intimidated and insulted politicians using an anonymous Twitter account. For example, he wanted Hugo de Jonge – the minister responsible for Covid measures – to be given a one-way-ticket to a Nazi tribunal and called prime minister Mark Rutte a member of the Dutch Nazi Party (NSB). Saxion now feels that as a teacher he plays an exemplary role and that his anonymous tweets do not fit in with that. They have “agreed” that he should leave.

The former lecturer is number thirteen on the list of political party BBB, but says that he no longer wants to become a member of Parliament. The party blamed him for having lied about the tweets, but accepted his apologies for doing so. Last week, BBB leader Caroline van der Plas did argue on *NPO Radio 1* that Rekers should be given a second chance: “We need to quit with this cancel culture in the Netherlands, where someone who does something wrong is immediately sacked.” Earlier, Rekers stated that he was “confused” during the period when he sent those hateful tweets.

### Ignored academics

Arriving too late for a lecture because your train – contrary to the schedule – did not stop at the campus. Or after a long day of studying or doing research, you see the ‘Sprinter’ happily whiz passed you at the station. Students and employees at Tilburg University have almost become accustomed to it. Sister newspaper *Univers* reports that Tilburg University station has been passed by 47 times over the past two months. Which results in quite some frustration among those who then arrive too late. “It is not all that bad if it is for a lecture,” said a student, “but in the case of an exam, it is extremely problematic.”

Why does railway service NS ‘ignore’ students and academics in Tilburg? The transport service takes that measure every now and again to catch up after delays, in order to prevent more trains being delayed on the same route. This is something that happens at many other stations in the Netherlands, said spokesperson Arno Leblanc to *Univers*. “Sometimes, I hear people say: ‘Why Tilburg University station? Choose a different station to skip.’” Leblanc justifies the NS's strategy by saying that “this is one of the few stations on the route where trains stop four times an hour.”



### Wyck in the shit

For a couple of months now, they have been putting on a spectacular show above Maastricht almost every day: swarms of tens of thousands of starlings that come out to ‘dance’ in the sky around sunset. But for those living in the Wyck district, there isn't just the pleasure of watching the autumn phenomenon. After their aerial show, the birds descend to the trees on the Wilhelminasingel and elsewhere, where they all spend the night. This is also where they relieve themselves. As a result, the parked cars of residents and hotel guests, as well as the long rows of (swap)bikes in front of student houses are given with a fresh layer of starling pooh every night. How long is this inconvenience going to continue? It is possible that the cleaning utensils can be put away soon, Joop Speth from the Vogelwerkgroep Maastricht said to *RTV Maastricht* last week. The trees are actually still providing shelter and hence safety. But, “when the leaves fall, the starlings may decide to move on.”

## Lecturers refuse to teach after pro-Palestinian protest

For the time being, two lecturers from the Faculty of Health, Medicine & Life Sciences (FHML) do not want to teach in the Design Thinking project at University College Maastricht (UCM). They were shocked by the language used during the pro-Palestinian occupation of UCM on 1 November.

Inquiries made to various people within the university proved that nobody was prepared to provide the names of the two: they want to remain anonymous. President of the Executive Board Rianne Letschert has spoken with them, but does not want to give an in-depth account of the talk.

"They didn't know, just like we didn't, that a sit-in would take place at UCM," said Letschert, and they were shocked by the language: for example, the Israeli actions in Gaza were labelled as "genocide". This made them feel unsafe, said Letschert, who emphasises that the two never felt physically threatened.

In answer to the question whether one or both of the lecturers have a Jewish background, as other media reported, she said: "I don't know, and I would like to refrain from using labels." She has recently spoken to both pro-Palestinian and to pro-Israeli students: the two groups consist of people with very diverse backgrounds, said Letschert.

### Board statement

On Monday afternoon, the Executive Board did publish a statement about the war in Gaza. In it, the Board expressed its dismay at the violence and human rights violations that have been taking place in Israel and the Palestinian territories since 7 October. The Executive Board condemns "all acts leading to civilian casualties" and calls for dialogue within the university "to ensure that this tragic situation does not divide us".

The statement follows the "many questions" that the Executive Board has recently received, says spokesperson Koen Augustijn. The statement does not contain an unambiguous position in the conflict, as pro-Palestinian students previously demanded.

Peter Doorackers



Pro-Palestinian slogan on the building at the Minderbroedersberg Photo: Observant

## Final evaluation of *the Future of Working* Silent compartments, call cells and hybrid meeting spaces, please

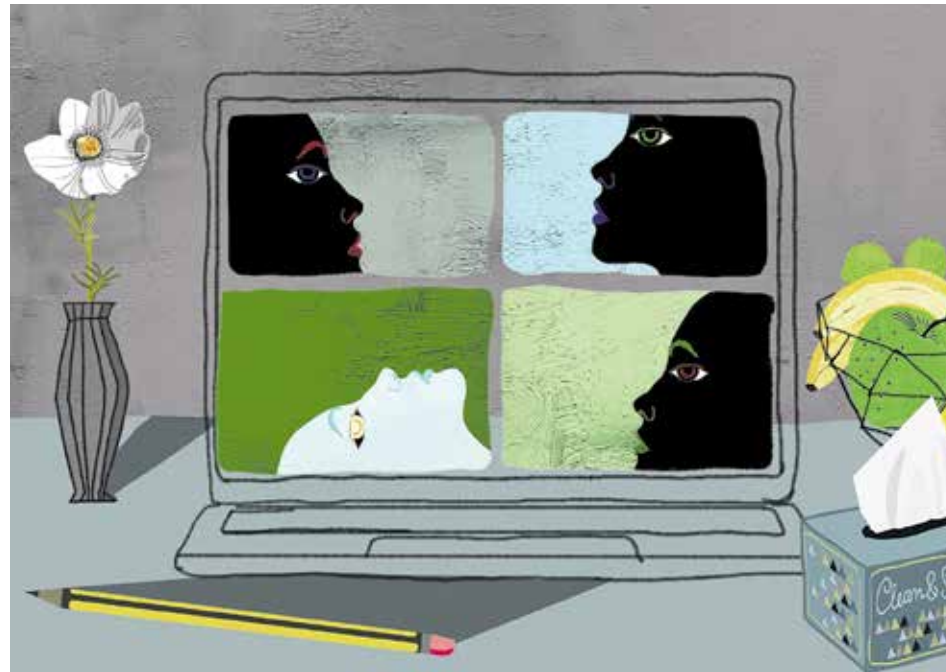


Illustration: Simone Golob

*How much does Maastricht University like hybrid working? The final evaluation by taskforce Future of Working shows that employees have found their way. They do think, however, that more attention should be paid to new colleagues who need to get to know the organisation. A new layout of UM buildings is on the wish list; at the moment, there are insufficient facilities to hold hybrid and other meetings, to physically meet each other, or to make phone calls in peace.*

During the Covid pandemic, the so-called Future of Working taskforce saw the light – because what was to be done with hundreds of people who suddenly have to work from home (and even now still partly want to)? Meanwhile, there are desks, chairs and monitors in many homes 'paid for by the boss', people receive monthly compensation for working from home, there are 'working with hybrid teams' courses for managers and more than 2,000 employees have submitted a working-from-home agreement, which includes a schedule of how many days they will be at the university and how many days they will work from their laptops at home.

### Tougher

Many things are up and running, project leader Cerie Heuts concluded in the latest meeting of the University Council's operational management committee on 8 November, in which the final evaluation was discussed. The taskforce's job is done. For the final evaluation, 32 participants (both managers and non-managers) were interviewed. Employees agree on one thing: they do not want to return to the pre-Covid situation, in which everyone always works from the office. Managers also see the advantages, 'at an individual level', but are concerned about the feeling of being part of a team. They also have difficulties with their role: hybrid working has made this tougher. And what do staff think about how the boss comes across? Some feel that they provide enough freedom. Others are more critical; the person in charge would adhere to the 60/40 ratio (60 per cent at UM, 40 per cent at home) too strictly. The point of

departure shouldn't be 'how many days do we work in the office', but 'which activities do we feel should take place in the office', the evaluation shows.

### Catching up

Another thing that became clear: we go to the office to meet others and make contact, to catch up with colleagues, and to have discussions in a group; the social function has become more important. And no, there is not necessarily less need for space, but "the space should be used differently," they said. Faculties and service centres need to think about new layouts. Such adaptations do not always mean considerable renovations. A classroom that already has a screen on the wall for presentations can easily be fitted with a camera and microphone to make it suitable for hybrid meetings, the taskforce stated in the document. People also want silent compartments and call cells. Another wish: IT uniformity. That is still difficult at the moment, because a number of faculties manage their IT systems in their own way. Moreover, not everyone chooses the standard model laptop, so various docking stations are being used. ICTS and the Corporate Information Office (CIO) therefore advise "a more central grip to make the digital working environment more manageable"; an action plan will follow.

### Control

In the University Council committee, Mark Govers (member on behalf of the academic staff) took exception to a phrase, which said that management should be "based more on trust and less on control". What is UM doing about this? Who is teaching them this? Is there focus on this during job interviews, he wanted to know. According to project leader Heuts, there are courses by the Leadership Academy. "But", Govers reckons, "the people who need that, most likely won't attend." Nick Bos, Vice President of the Executive Board, emphasised that it takes some getting used to. "We started hybrid working three years ago. You have to give people time."

Wendy Degens



## The genie of global Dutch

“

If you're not a native Dutch speaker, you've had this experience: not soon after starting an interaction with a Dutch speaker, they switch into English. It's one reason why people say Dutch is difficult to learn—you can't get any practice in.

Often this switching is taken to be a hallmark of Dutch pragmatism. Recently I came across another explanation, rooted in policies and attitudes during the Dutch colonial era. Of the world's top ten languages by total number of speakers, four came from rather modest beginnings and spread thanks to colonization. English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese were imposed on colonized peoples, often to the detriment of indigenous languages. But the Dutch did something different: they kept their language for themselves.

As Kees Groeneboer wrote in *Weg tot het Westen*, his classic 1993 history of Dutch language policy in places like Suriname and Indonesia (which was also published in English as *Gateway to the West*), the Dutch believed that teaching a European language to local populations would only spread Western knowledge, including ideas about liberty and equality, hence endangering the colonial enterprise. The story has more nuance than this, but the outcome is clear. With their linguistic desires squashed, only 2 per cent of the population of Indonesia could speak Dutch at the end of the colonial period, after 350 years of Dutch control. It would be simplistic to suggest that Dutch isn't a global language today because of such policies. There are other reasons, too: Dutch business interests and military power arrived relatively late to colonisable territories, for example. But consider that if the entire population of modern Indonesia (273 million) spoke Dutch today, the language would be in the world's top ten, rivaling Modern Standard Arabic for total number of speakers.

As someone said recently, the genie of English can't be put back in its bottle. But the genie of global Dutch will never be coaxed out.

But there's good news. It turns out that if you ask someone you're talking with to stay in Dutch, because you have to practice, then they'll usually do it. And that suggests there's more going with language attitudes than those from centuries ago.

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Michael Erard,  
Funding Advisor at the Faculty of Law

series: students about their future

# “It’s nice to be able to escape into my own fantasy world”

On the table is an A3-size world map, meticulously hand-drawn. At first glance, it looks like Earth, but the strange names – the continent of Dhârâk Thûr, the Randuïne Highlands, the Kingdom of Âmârynn – reveal that it’s a fantasy world. It’s the brainchild of Thijs Schenk (25), a third-year student of Health Sciences. **He’s been working on it for years and plans to write many books set in his world.**



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Schenk’s dream is to have a long career as a fantasy author. He fell in love with the genre at a young age. He even remembers the exact moment it happened – on a family holiday in Germany, when he was eight years old. “I couldn’t sleep, so I went to the living room. My uncle was watching *The Lord of the Rings* on TV. He let me watch with him for half an hour. I still remember the exact scenes. My dad was angry when he found out; he thought the film was too violent. Back home, I downloaded the entire trilogy and watched it in one day, secretly on my laptop under the covers.” He’s been devouring fantasy books ever since. His student room is full of book series, from *Ranger’s Apprentice* to *Harry Potter*. His interest in writing his own

stories began when he was about 18 years old, but he decided not to study writing. “I wanted a backup plan. You have to be really successful to make a living as an author. It takes a lot of time and a bit of luck. After graduation, I plan to work in healthcare three days per week and write books on the side. Without the pressure of having to publish, it’ll hopefully still feel like a hobby, which is also conducive to the creative process. And I’m enjoying my studies

so far, so I don’t regret my decision.”

## Magical powers

His studies also serve as a source of inspiration. “In my fantasy world, people have magical powers. To make it somewhat believable, I consider the biological processes behind those powers. Using magic costs energy, for example. What happens if someone uses too

much magic? For that, I’ve looked into phenomena like hypothermia or a coma. And magic can drive people insane, for which I’ve drawn inspiration from mental disorders.” Schenk has looked to other fields for inspiration as well. “I wondered what realistic climates in my world would be. I researched things like ocean currents and plate tectonics to decide what different areas would look like. Yes, it’s a bit like Problem-Based Learning (PBL)”, he laughs.

## Escapism

All this has resulted in a detailed world with kingdoms, races, cities and ethnic groups, each with its own culture and history. It took him about seven years. “That’s quite extreme. Many fantasy authors suggest giving readers the impression that a whole world exists without fully developing it, to save time. But I went all out. I spent months on the map alone. I channel everything into my world.”

Does he also incorporate issues like climate change or the wars in Ukraine and Gaza? “No, I try to steer clear of real-world problems. My fantasy world is a place to escape the struggles of reality, not just for future readers but also for myself. I was depressed for four years. It was comforting to escape from everyday life into a book or series. That’s also when I started working on my own world. I find it more interesting than reality; I have more control over it and feel more at home there.” Does he ever lose himself in it? “No. After a day of writing, I always return to Earth.”

## Publishing

He has just finished his first book. Well, the first draft. “Now the real work begins – rewriting, ensuring continuity, incorporating feedback from writing buddies.” He writes in English. “I think it’s a nicer language to write in, and it’ll reach a wider audience.” The process takes up a lot of his time, almost on a daily basis. The next step: publishing. “I’ll probably self-publish it. Going through a publisher is less work, but I don’t want to sign away the rights to my book.”

Besides, Schenk already has plenty of ideas. The book is to be the first in a long series. “And my biggest dream is to inspire others to create games, TV series or comics set in my world, all managed by my own company.” What if it doesn’t work out, and writing remains a hobby? “I’d be fine with that, too. I’m not doing this to become rich or famous. I write because it’s something I love to do.”

Dennis Vaendel

In this biweekly series, students are interviewed about their future plans; their expectations, dilemmas and fears. To what extent does their past play a role, and what about the major worldwide problems, think of climate change, war, political instability, growing poverty, and so on.

Are UM students and staff concerned about the outcome of the upcoming election?



# “Axing the International Classroom would set us back decades”

Text Wendy Degens, Riki Janssen Photo Joey Roberts  
Illustrations Shutterstock

The Dutch general election is coming up. High polling parties like VVD and Pieter Omtzigt’s NSC are advocating for bachelor’s programmes to be taught in Dutch again. Are UM students and staff concerned about this? Are they worried that English-taught programmes will be cut and everyone, staff and students alike, will be forced to take Dutch lessons? Or do they think that Maastricht University will remain unaffected?

“There’s an election coming up? I didn’t know that. I split my time between Maastricht and London, and I live in Germany, just across the border from Nijmegen. I’m from Greece and I mostly follow Greek news. I’m afraid I hadn’t realised we may have a problem here.” **Michalis Moatsos**, a relatively new assistant professor of International Economics at the School of Business and Economics (SBE), seems quite cheerful. He recalls that it has come up in meetings that certain political parties (see box page 8) are critical of the increased use of English and number of international students in Dutch higher education. “But I keep hearing that Maastricht University will be granted exceptional status, which sounds like music to my ears. I’m not going to worry about things I can’t control.”

## Surreal

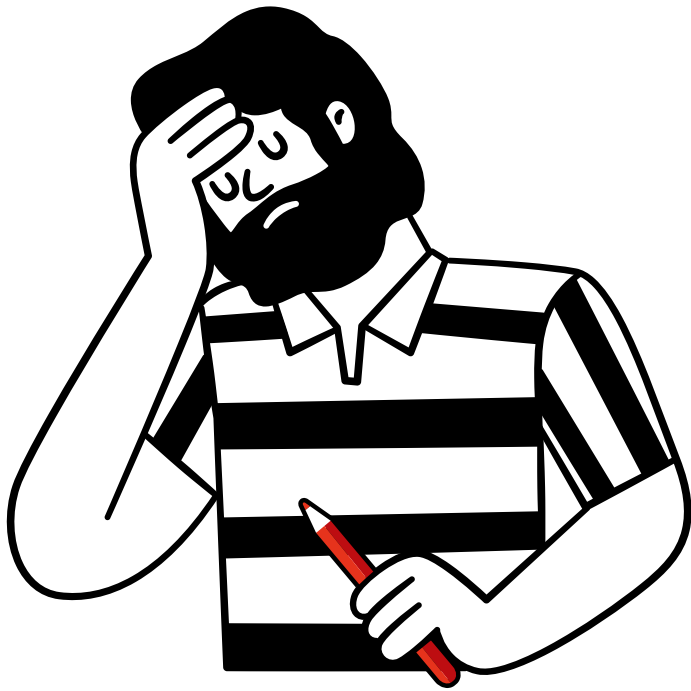
One floor up from Moatsos, the mood is very different. “I’ve been following the national political debate with astonishment and disbelief”, says **Gaby Odekerken-Schröder**, vice dean of internationalisation at SBE and a

member of the university-wide Strategic Board Internationalisation. “Since the 1980s, we’ve been working tirelessly to establish an international university. It’s in our DNA; it’s who we are. It’s about so much more than just providing education in English. I think [Omtzigt doesn’t understand what happens in schools like SBE](#). If he did, he wouldn’t propose introducing Dutch as the language of instruction in all higher education institutions. It’s surreal.”

**Jan Super**, a master’s student at the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), feels the same way. “It only makes sense for my programme to be taught in English. Artificial intelligence is an international discipline. It’d be absurd to teach it in Dutch.” He laments the right-wing attitudes in The Hague: “Omtzigt won’t just drop the subject of reducing international student numbers if his party wins the election. Pushing Dutch as the primary language of instruction is a clever way for him to cut English-taught programmes so as to deter international students from coming here.” His dean at FSE, **Thomas Cleij**, thinks it won’t come to that. “It’s obvious that UM should be granted exceptional status based on its location and the labour market”, he says matter-of-factly. But what if the new government tightens legislation? “They’re saying that educational institutions will need to justify why programmes are taught in English, not that we won’t be allowed to teach in English. Take our faculty – English is the universal form of communication in science and engineering fields, just like in European Law, International Business and European Public Health. It’s only logical that we target an international student group.”

**Bo Schmeitz**, a third-year student of Tax Law – “a Dutch-taught programme with Dutch-language learning resources, tutorials and lectures” – agrees with Cleij, as does Odekerken-Schröder. Schmeitz thinks it makes perfect sense for UM to be granted exceptional

## election



# “It is starting to get out of hand. It’s like we have to fight for courses to be taught in Dutch”

status, especially considering its location in the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion. **Odekerken-Schröder** concurs: “If any university will be granted exceptional status, it’ll be UM. That’s what I tell concerned staff members. [We’ll fight tooth and nail to make it happen.](#)”

## International Classroom

According to **Odekerken-Schröder**, most SBE students are not all that worried about the national debate on internationalisation in higher education. “But if it comes up, they say, ‘Well, where else can I go to prepare for an international career?’ You can’t teach an International Business programme without an International Classroom. It’s like teacher training without children. Axing the International Classroom would set us back decades.”

The International Classroom, adds **Moatsos**, not only prepares students for an international career, but also fosters intercultural understanding. “The recent wars in Ukraine and Palestine show how important it is that parties sit around the table together and talk to each other. That’s what we instil in students in our International Classroom.”

## Gone too far

Has UM gone too far when it comes to English as a medium of instruction? Does the university teach too many programmes in English? Yes, say some people at faculties that still teach partly in Dutch, like the Faculty of Law. To be clear, he isn’t opposed to internationalisation, stresses **Jacques Claessen**, endowed professor of Restorative Justice and coordinator of the Dutch track of the Master in Forensics, Criminology and Law. “It would be narrow-minded to close the borders to students and researchers.” But, he says, “It is starting to get out of hand. It’s like we have to fight for courses to be taught in Dutch. More and more electives are offered exclusively in English. It has to end.”

**Frank Huisman**, emeritus professor of History of Medicine and one of the founders of Science in Transition (an organisa-

tion that has been fighting to reduce workload in academia and reform research assessment since 2013), is also of the opinion that the situation in the Netherlands has got out of hand. Like Claessen, he acknowledges that internationalisation is a fact of modern life, “and English-medium instruction supports internationalisation. But we should decide for each individual faculty, each individual programme, whether teaching in English is necessary. Dutch as a language of instruction has completely disappeared from my own faculty, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS).”

He continues, “The Netherlands is at the top of the class in Europe when it comes to English-taught curricula. If you look at the *Language Matters* report by the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts (KVAB), the situation in the Netherlands is Flanders’s greatest nightmare. Dutch has been brushed aside as an academic language; the number of international students has skyrocketed; there’s a student housing shortage; the faculty-student ratio is out of balance. UM once aspired to be the Dutch Harvard or Oxford. But Harvard has more money than all Dutch universities combined. At Oxford, the faculty-student ratio is one to three; here, it’s one to thirty. They use that money to buy quality, consistently scoring high in rankings like the Shanghai Ranking. Here, the quality of education has been adversely affected by growing student numbers – workload has become excessive, lecturers are burning out and students are getting pity passes.”

In stark contrast, **Odekerken-Schröder** at SBE resolutely believes that UM hasn’t gone too far. “And I’m not just preaching to the choir here. SBE introduced its first English-taught programme, International Management, around 1988, and we’ve continued to build from there. UM is still a bilingual university; just look at Dutch Law or Medicine.”

## Pile of money

What makes this issue so complex is the funding system, explains **Huisman**. Government funding for Dutch universities

is linked to student numbers and the number of PhD graduates. “The university that attracts the most students gets the biggest slice of the cake. It’s a perverse incentive. The trend has been the same for years – the same pile of money and an increase in students.”

**Janosch Prinz**, assistant professor of Social and Political Philosophy at FASoS, also points out the adverse effect of the funding system. “[Universities all fight for the same pile of money.](#) One grows at another’s expense. Dutch universities are united in Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), formerly the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). But how united are they really? Why have they never told the government ‘We refuse to grow more’? If you close ranks, you’re better able to withstand the pressure.”

Some say that international students are sought after because they’re cash cows. **Odekerken-Schröder** emphatically rejects this view. “Our International Business programme admits a maximum of 750 first-year students”, she explains. “Without that cap, we’d get four times as many. We recruit students for the International Classroom; our focus is on quality.”

There are no winners in this funding system, concludes **Huisman**. He thinks it would be better if universities received a fixed amount of funding and had fewer students. “So, yes, I’m in favour of a smaller university and selective admissions. Not all of our current students are suitable for their programmes.”

## More superficial

“Officially, UM is a bilingual university, but in reality, it’s mostly an English-language university. Just look at the number of English-taught programmes, the increasingly international staff, the language of communication in meetings”, says **Claessen**. “If you think the use of English is getting out of hand, you’re quickly dismissed as conservative. But I believe that people can express themselves best in their native language. I’ve noticed it myself, too. If I want to express a nuanced idea, I prefer to speak Dutch. But in meetings, almost everyone automatically speaks

## Reporting process

*Observant* interviewed a total of nine UM employees and students to see if they are concerned about the possible consequences of the upcoming Dutch general election on 22 November. Certain political parties are highly critical of the increased use of English

in higher education, and a lot could change if they came to power.

For reasons that are not entirely clear to us, many of the international employees we approached declined to be interviewed. Students weren’t exactly queuing up to share

their thoughts, either. Some told us they didn’t know enough about the topic, whereas others simply said “No comment”.

During University Council meetings in the previous academic year, there were repeated discussions about international employees

feeling increasingly out of place in the Netherlands because of the political debate on the internationalisation of higher education. Despite our efforts, we were unable to find any international employees who no longer feel at home here.





## “If you don’t know what bitterballen and Sinterklaas are after four years something’s wrong”

English without thinking twice about it. I often wonder why.”

**Schmeitz**, who studies a Dutch-taught programme and lives in a “Dutch bubble”, is a student member of the Faculty Council of Law. He feels “social pressure” to switch to English during council meetings. And he, too, struggles with this when “I want to express a very nuanced idea. It’s just easier in my native language.”

The same thing happens in tutorial meetings, says **Boy Houben**, associate professor of Internal Medicine and chair of the Faculty Council of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML). “That goes for both students and tutors. You get less depth. [People have to search for words; discussions are more superficial.](#) Giving a lecture is different – you prepare it in advance, it’s about your own field, all the literature is in English.” He says the FHML community doesn’t seem too concerned about the upcoming national election, “neither students nor staff. If the government decides that the Dutch language should play a role in all programmes, our lecturers can easily adjust. It’d be a problem for international students, though.” And ultimately for the university, which would see the number of international students drop. To return to the language of communication in meetings: **Super**, who is a student member of the FSE Faculty Council, believes that everyone should be able to participate. Meetings should therefore be held in English, the language all students and staff understand. He brings up the issue of the FHML Faculty Council (see box at the right), which holds meetings in Dutch

despite the fact that one of its student members doesn’t speak the language. “She’s being excluded. They can’t do that. It’s a democratic body of a university with a lot of international students.” **Houben**, chair of the FHML Faculty Council, says it’s an “unfortunate situation” for which the council has found the best possible solution “for now” (see box).

### Bilingual

UM requires international employees to reach B1-level Dutch. **Moatsos** (SBE) was unaware of this clause until he actually read it in the contract. “No one told me about it during the recruitment process. I don’t feel the need and I don’t have time for it either to learn Dutch from my own initiative. But if it’s required, I’ll do it.”

“It’s part of your commitment”, says **Odekerken-Schröder**. “Even if you’re only here for four years, it’s nice if you can make yourself understood on the bus, at yoga class or in a shop. If you don’t know what *bitterballen*, *Sinterklaas* and *stroopwafels* are after spending four years in the Netherlands, something’s wrong. UM gives you the opportunity to learn a new language for free. It’s part of being a good

employer.”

**Houben** couldn’t agree more. “If you move to a country, don’t you want to participate in its society? Don’t you want to integrate into the culture? Besides, knowing the language makes you more likely to stay.”

**Claessen** thinks the language policy should be more strictly enforced. “UM has taken away every incentive. That said, permanent international staff does make an effort to understand Dutch, exceptions aside. I don’t want to be accused of excluding people; I don’t do that. But if UM wants to be a bilingual university, it should put its money where its mouth is.”

Having joined UM in 2019, **Janosch Prinz** now speaks fluent Dutch. “When I signed my contract, it said that I’d have to reach B1-level Dutch within three years. That was the last I heard of it until two weeks ago, when I got an email saying that FASoS will begin enforcing the policy. They gave us two years to learn the language.” He didn’t need the external motivation. “[I wanted to integrate into the culture, get to know it, and learning the language was fundamental to that.](#) I’m from Germany, so I had it relatively easy. I studied a lot during the pandemic, together with my American wife, who also works at UM. After that, I practiced a lot. Is it a good policy? B1-level Dutch is not sufficient for teaching and research, but it’s sufficient for chatting over drinks, at the school playground or in the supermarket. I’d like to keep improving so that I can teach in Dutch as well. No language is neutral; each language offers its own perspective on the world and therefore on research.”

more years and then they stay here. If you look at it objectively, without feelings and opinions, you can’t be against internationalisation.”

His colleague **Frank Huisman** at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences sees it a bit differently. In his view, Dutch taxpayers do “end up paying for the education of international students. The EU wants free movement of persons and student exchanges; let the EU pay for it.”

## English vs Dutch in the Faculty Council

*This academic year, a Czech student was elected to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Health, Medicine & Life Sciences (FHML). The council has always communicated in Dutch, and most of its documents are written in Dutch. But this student doesn’t speak, read or understand Dutch. What now?*

The student’s fellow party members (NovUM) have already raised the issue twice in the University Council over the past few months. In September, student council member Andrew Scrivener addressed Vice President of the Executive Board Nick Bos: “Isn’t it absurd that someone who was elected by the student body cannot perform her duties because she doesn’t speak the language? I think it’s safe to assume that everybody in the room speaks English.” In reply, Bos pointed out that UM is a bilingual university, and faculty councils are free to choose their language of communication. “At the same time, it’s important that everyone understands what is being said.” Students who don’t speak Dutch should get “all possible support”, said Bos, such as English summaries of important documents. But he also advises these students to learn Dutch. The student in question, Olga Kosjakova, raised the issue with the chair and vice chair of the FHML Faculty Council, Iwan de Jong and Boy Houben. “It’s an unfortunate situation”, comments Houben. “Apparently, the student didn’t know that we hold meetings in Dutch. The council has discussed it, and several members feel that it’s more challenging to have discussions in English, especially when it comes to complex issues like the budget or things outside your area of expertise. They prefer to communicate in Dutch.” Eventually, it was decided that Dutch will remain the primary language of communication and Kosjakova can raise her questions in English. Her fellow student party member in the council can bring her up to speed on discussions and documents, which will also continue to be written in Dutch. “There are simply too many documents to translate. We’ve asked the faculty board, but they don’t have the resources. There are too many vacancies in the communications department.” Houben suggests using machine translation software, “but a budget plan of more than a hundred pages is a different story”.

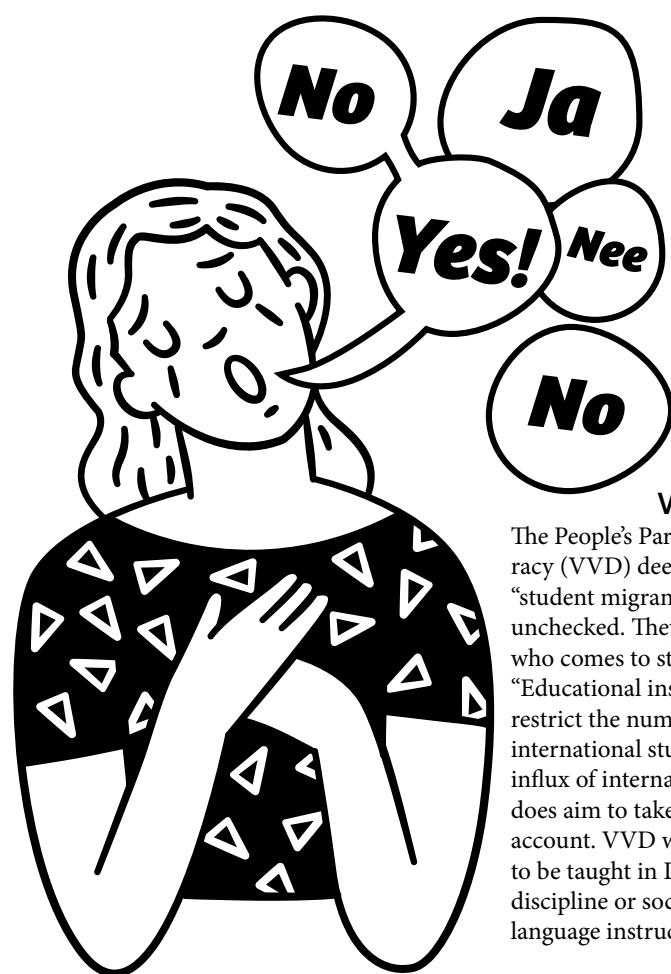
While Kosjakova understands that most council members prefer to conduct meetings in their native language, “in an academic/professional environment, I believe you should communicate in a language that everyone understands. As an elected student representative, I would like to be able to follow everything. I can’t follow four-hour meetings in Dutch. For me, it would be best if important documents were translated into English and spontaneous discussions took place partly in English.” “That’s what happens when she raises a question”, responds Houben.

## What do taxpayers pay for?

FSE dean **Thomas Cleij** seems irritated by the notion that Dutch taxpayers pay for the education of international students. “Anyone who believes that should take a moment to think about *who* they’re paying for. You’re paying for *my* salary and that of my colleagues, the people who teach, clean, do research, and so on. People tend to forget that students contribute much more to the economy than they cost. They receive scholarships, for example.

They live here, go out for drinks here, go shopping, eat at restaurants, you name it. Moreover, quite a few students end up staying, especially in science and engineering fields. By ‘delivering’ graduates, universities also make it more attractive for international companies like Medtronic and ASML to stay in the Netherlands. It’s actually a great deal – these young people have been educated elsewhere for 18 years, then we educate them for a few

## election



## What do the parties say?

Observant looked at the manifestos of the highest polling parties to find out where they stand on internationalisation and/or the language of instruction in higher education.

### VVD

The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) deems the current influx of "student migrants" to be too high and unchecked. They want more control over who comes to study in the Netherlands. "Educational institutions should be able to restrict the number of places available for international students." In restricting the influx of international students, the party does aim to take regional circumstances into account. VVD wants bachelor's programmes to be taught in Dutch, unless the industry, discipline or society necessitates English-language instruction.

### NSC

New Social Contact (NSC) advocates for restricting the number of international students in the Netherlands by tying it to factors such as the availability of housing and university places in university cities. "This can be differentiated by region and sector." NSC also wants to make Dutch the standard language of instruction at universities. Additionally, the party wants to introduce a waiting period for EU students to qualify for financial support in the Netherlands and require these students to work a lot more than the current requirement of at least 32 hours per month. The latter would require EU rules to be amended.

### GroenLinks-PvdA

The left-wing coalition of GroenLinks and the Labour Party (PvdA) calls for an overhaul of the current funding system, proposing that educational institutions receive bigger fixed budgets while reducing student-based budgeting. They aim to

tighten the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) to encourage programmes to be more deliberate about their choice of language of instruction. "We expect closer ministerial supervision."

### BBB

The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) aims to restrict the influx of international students by changing the business model of higher education. However, the BBB manifesto states that international students who are deemed to "add value" to the Dutch economy are welcome, provided that sufficient housing is available.

### PVV

The Party for Freedom (PVV) advocates for fewer international students in the Netherlands. "We will restrict student migration by offering bachelor's programmes exclusively in Dutch and capping the number of international students in master's programmes."



## Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

17-11, 10.00 h Boudewijn Visscher  
17-11, 13.00 h Alexander Dicks  
17-11, 16.00 h Sanita Rugina  
18-11, 13.00 h Yvonne M.J. Goërtz  
18-11, 16.00 h Samvel Mkhitarjan  
19-11, 10.00 h Matthias Leute  
19-11, 13.00 h Miriam Weijers  
19-11, 16.00 h Tom P.M.M. Vluggen  
20-11, 10.00 h Niccolò Galli Joint doctoral degree Universitat Augsburg and Maastricht University  
20-11, 13.00 h Alicia Veninga  
20-11, 16.00 h Christy B.M. Tulen  
21-11, 13.00 h Tobias Meßmer  
21-11, 16.30 h Dr. Pim Martens inauguratie  
24-11, 10.00 h Adriana Solovei  
24-11, 13.00 h Ilknur Sanli  
24-11, 16.00 h Jeannette Tas  
25-11, 10.00 h Dennis J.N.J. Soemers  
25-11, 13.00 h Stefano Navarro double doctoral degree Maastricht University and University of Würzburg  
26-11, 13.00 h Ilaria De Simone double doctoral degree Maastricht University - University of Reading  
26-11, 16.00 h Prof. dr. G. Wesseling afscheidscollege  
1-12, 10.00 h Carmen F.M. van Hooijdonk  
1-12, 13.00 h Marla T.H. Hahnrahts  
1-12, 16.30 h Dr. Roland Pierik inauguratie  
4-12, 10.00 h Francesco Giancaterini  
4-12, 13.00 h Irdanto Saputra Lase Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University - Ghent University  
4-12, 16.00 h Priscilla Yeye Adumoah Attafuah  
5-12, 10.00 h Sergey Primakov  
5-12, 13.00 h Styliani- Dialechti Voulgaropoulou  
5-12, 16.00 h Rosa Ricarda Leni Charlotte Thielmann  
6-12, 10.00 h Elena Caporali

6-12, 16.00 h Doke J.M. Buurman  
7-12, 10.00 h Michel R.A. van Hooren  
7-12, 13.00 h Lianne M. Loosveld  
8-12, 10.00 h Joey Tang  
8-12, 13.00 h Sander Paul Martijn Kramer  
8-12, 16.30 h Dr. Simon Beusaert inauguratie  
11-12, 10.00 h Agorastos Agorastos  
11-12, 13.00 h Shuhe Zhang  
11-12, 16.00 h John Boniface Nakutta  
12-12, 10.00 h Eva Helena Harlacher (née Straußfeld) Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University - RWTH Aachen University  
12-12, 13.00 h Mohamed Kassem  
12-12, 16.00 h Anouk A.F. Stoffels  
13-12, 10.00 h Xiaodi Zhang  
13-12, 13.00 h Maartje Massen  
13-12, 16.00 h Jan-Frieder Harmsen  
14-12, 10.00 h Sung Yoon Yang  
14-12, 13.00 h Heike E.F. Becker  
14-12, 16.00 h Gemma M.C. van Ruitenbeek  
15-12, 10.00 h Anne-Marije Hulshof  
15-12, 13.00 h Lieke Bakker  
15-12, 16.30 h Dr. Alessandro Bertolini inauguratie  
18-12, 10.00 h Jennifer Monereo-Sánchez,  
18-12, 13.00 h Cenay Aliye Elisa Akin  
18-12, 16.00 h Zoë Louise Miller  
19-12, 10.00 h Meena Putturaj  
19-12, 13.00 h Ilishkina Daria Igorevna  
19-12, 16.00 h Estera Wiczorek Joint Doctoral Degree Maastricht University - Jagiellonian University  
20-12, 10.00 h Cassandra Barber  
20-12, 13.00 h Alessandro Cianfoni  
20-12, 16.00 h Joey Nicholson  
21-12, 10.00 h Nikki C.C. Werkman  
22-12, 10.00 h Izabiliza Liliane Mpabanzi  
22-12, 13.00 h Melissa J.J. Voorn  
22-12, 16.00 h Ozan Yazar



THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTIES, SERVICE CENTRES AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON

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Maastricht University

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\*Medewerkers van UM kunnen een volledig overzicht van interne- en externe vacatures vinden door in te loggen op SuccessFactors via Umployeee.



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