

Speech by Kristel Baele, President of the Executive Board, Erasmus University Rotterdam

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(gesproken woord geldt)

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

I am very pleased to welcome you to the Erasmus University today. When the VSNU asked us to host this event on our campus, I could only have hoped for such a fantastic turnout.

This only shows how important this subject is to all of us.

As you know last spring the VSNU has published its view on internationalization and the Minister of Education wrote her vision in a letter to the House of Representatives.

Both of these address the challenges we have regarding internationalization. Some of these challenges we, the universities, can take on ourselves, whether or not in regional alliances. With our combined knowledge and experience we are certain that we can solve part of the problems ourselves. We did ask the minister for help in order to regulate the influx and have urged her to adjust legislation in this respect. I will get back to that a little later on.

Today we have work to be done, to further address the challenges and benefits of internationalization.

I am sure you are all aware of the dual reputation that internationalization currently has. The number of international students is increasing rapidly, as the census of 1 October showed. As a result of this the support within society for internationalization of education is under pressure, feeding discussions about displacement and funding. And meanwhile we have to keep the doors open for international talent, without jeopardizing the accessibility of higher education for Dutch students.

If I simplify it: there is the internationalization-is-a-blessing-camp in one corner and the internationalization-is-a-threat-camp in the other. This may seem like an unbridgeable gap, but it isn't and should not be.

In order to get out of this divide, we need to have dialogue and exchange arguments in order to build bridges. Because internationalization is a condition for good quality higher education.

The minister understands that these different viewpoints have led to discussion in society and she addresses a number of important issues, but also states that internationalization adds value. Her ambition is also to allow every Dutch student to gain international experience.

Our higher education is good, very good indeed. That is why it attracts students from abroad. As minister Van Engelshoven rightfully concludes: this is something to be very proud of.

But we are also familiar with the arguments used in the discourse of those opposed to or at least critical of internationalization: are the increasing numbers of international students causing the classrooms to burst out of their seams? Are courses taught exclusively in English discouraging Dutch students from applying? Can we provide proper housing? Is internationalization becoming a revenue model for universities? And most importantly, is all this a threat to the quality of our education?

That there is more to the subject than just pro or con, is a given. It is also a given that there is still much work to be done to figure out how to concretize the ideas put forth in the Internationalization Agenda. Our ambition for today is to take the lead in implementing this Agenda, and also to start working on the issues presented by the Minister of Education.

The theme of this conference is *Quality and Inclusion*. Today we will be discussing four subjects mentioned in these documents:

- Inclusive Internationalisation
- The additional value of the international classroom
- Retaining talent and

- Establishing an international community.

For this purpose I would like to suggest a statement of the day:

Internationalization is conditional for the quality of modern higher education. Allow me to elaborate. We know from research and experience that diversity in the classroom leads to better results. Students from different cultures can learn a lot from each other. But this does not come automatically. It is important for universities to continuously monitor and validate their ambitions and claims regarding the added value of the international classroom.

At Erasmus University for example, many of our programmes include international viewpoints or intercultural communication aspects in their curriculum. Recently a multiyear cohort based research project started measuring the development of intercultural competences (ICC) among students of the Erasmus School for History Culture and Communication.

In addition we started an applied research project for exploring differences in outcome and impact between Dutch and international tracks of a number of Bachelor programmes. These research projects are facilitated via our 'Community for Learning and Innovation' and we invited an expert in this field for additional coaching: Jeanine Gregersen-Hermans – who will be moderating the session on 'Additional value of the international classroom'.

Another reason to provide an international classroom is that it increases the job perspectives of our graduates on the job market.

Nowadays every business, big or small, has an international client base, international suppliers and they look for knowledge all over the world. So every student, national and international, benefits from an international orientation. When I talk to employers about their talent needs, they always mention the advantages of graduates being interculturally and internationally oriented. So it is evident this element has to be part of the

curriculum and an international classroom and international study climate will provide this.

So the challenges are obvious: how do we create the right circumstances for balanced and attractive international education of high quality that is accessible for as many students as possible, without bursting out of our seams and seeing the quality of education take a turn for the worse?

What are the conditions for this?

Language

Well, language policy is a very important one and it has a number of dimensions, which all have to do with quality and inclusion. Language proficiency of teaching staff should obviously be sufficient. And we have stated clearly their level should be at least C1. Next to this, in order to help international students feel at home, we at Erasmus University do a number of things. First of all, like many of you, we offer subsidized language training.

In addition, Dutch and international students join hands in a buddy system, where they help each other increase their language skills and familiarize with other cultures. And because students learn from each other not only within the walls of the classroom, we also want to involve students associations and invite them to create more interaction with international students. During the introduction week for new students, we have made adjustments in the program to enable a more diverse body of participants.

Talking to employers I found out they prefer our international graduates to master a basic command of the Dutch language, even in companies where English is the main language. They consider it necessary from an inclusion perspective. It helps new employees to fit in the social fabric of the company and Dutch society. So our university now also offers non-Dutch speaking students courses to learn Dutch.

And finally, we offer the possibility for international students and employees to participate in the University Council by using English as the main language of communication and to have all policy documents published in both English and Dutch.

Housing

Talking about quality and inclusion, there is also the issue of student housing. We have made great progress over the last couple of years. The challenges depend highly on the local context, which is why the VSNU proposed to, parallel to the national appointment framework, come up with regional solutions as well. On 4 October governments, housing agents, educational institutions and student organizations signed the National Action plan for Student Housing. Educational institutions will join hands with local parties to realize more and better student housing. I strongly believe in this regional approach.

In my opinion universities should take the initiative to start the discussion and this is exactly what we see happening.

Allow me to give you some examples of what we have done in Rotterdam.

We need to act from a long term perspective. For Erasmus University today's student is tomorrow's 'Rotterdammer'. In the near future this region will have a glaring shortfall of people with a higher education background. Our common interest therefore is that part of our students, national and international, stay here after graduation. In other words, we hope our current students will find jobs here, buy a house and start a family. That is why we look at student housing from a long term perspective, ensuring that students can remain in the city during the various stages of their life and career.

Erasmus University and the Hogeschool Rotterdam have been lobbying this spring with the new municipal coalition to build 2000 student units in the city - and successfully so. At present we are talking to the big housing corporations in the city to realize even more student housing in parts of the city that are perfect for developing housing for new, young target groups.

Influx

The hardest nut to crack tough, is the problem of the increasing number of international students. The influx is unpredictable and as we all know an increase in numbers can be harmful to the quality of education.

We are all operating in an open, transparent international environment. Because The Netherlands is so popular for its high quality, affordable and accessible higher education, we can expect more and more students from abroad wanting to come here. But managing volumes is extremely complicated. Let me illustrate this using the example of the city of Amsterdam, the first to start city marketing, as a result of which the number of tourists continues to rise. This is beneficial for the city, but it also has a downside: the city can hardly process the millions of visitors. They did take some measures, such as spreading the tourists (Amsterdam Beach for Zandvoort), improving facilities and restricting the AirB&Bs. But it is an illusion to think that should Amsterdam stop its city marketing today, the number of visitors will immediately drop and the locals will be among themselves again. Once you have become popular, word of mouth spreads.

For a university trying to regulate increasing volumes of international students, this is even more complex. Because if we score high in the international rankings, which we do, a lot of people will want to study here. Lower scores in these rankings would mean that the quality of our education and research is decreasing. And if we would limit our marketing efforts tomorrow or stop using international agents, this would have some effect, but the international student will continue to come.

We are all digitizing parts of our curricula, MOOCs being one the examples. The good news is that quality education becomes easily and internationally accessible, offered for free or for little charge, also to people who otherwise would not be able to enjoy academic education. But we also experienced that MOOCs are magnets for international students. If your MOOC is inspiring, participation may run into 1000

participants one year and you can expect an increase in the number of applications for your full degree programmes the next year. And should your MOOC go viral, you really have a problem. Should we ban MOOCs and online education? Of course not, they contribute to quality and inclusion. But we need instruments to regulate the subsequent influx.

Now let me dive deeper in the new toolbox we need to regulate international student influx.

Currently, the number of instruments any university has for regulating the number of international students are very limited and do not suffice. Therefore we call upon the government for deploying new legal instruments to regulate the influx. The context around internationalization has changed significantly since the 90s, when the current WHW was implemented. At that time, internationalization was no more than a marginal phenomenon.

Currently we only have one legal instrument to regulate influx, the *numerus fixus*. This was designed primarily for the admission to Dutch courses such as Medicine and Dentistry. Courses in the English language which attract a lot of students from abroad have a hard time dealing with the rules and regulations of the *numerus fixus*, because of the unwanted side effects.

So, it is about time that the WHW was revised so it can help us sustain internationalization as a quality criterion, in order to sustain the accessibility for Dutch students and to create a balanced international classroom.

Several instruments come into view:

Universities want to create an international classroom, a stimulating environment where students – Dutch and international – can prepare themselves for a future where international cooperation and working from an international perspective are becoming increasingly important.

But the international classroom will only work if it contains sufficient diversity in nationalities, cultures and backgrounds. Only then Dutch students can experience the added value of working together with different cultures and nationalities. Universities should be able to use cultural diversity as a selection criterion.

We advocate new legislation enabling us to govern admission based on the student applications. How? By creating legal possibilities that allow selection based on cultural diversity to be a qualitative contribution to the international classroom. Allow institutions to actively govern the diversity of courses, for example the ratio Dutch and international students. Such an active filtering should also be possible by maintaining the admission requirements for international students. That way we preserve quality: only the international students with the highest qualifications can study with us.

At present governing the composition of such a classroom can only be done for the small-scale intensive education at University Colleges. We suggest expanding the use of this quality instrument. Of course this requires great care in the application of such an instrument.

If there is much interest from abroad for English courses with a *numerus fixus*, we run the risk of Dutch students being displaced. Within the current legislation there is no way to avoid this.

If we would be legally permitted to place a *numerus fixus* on just one track, universities could consider to transform courses to an international English spoken track and a track where Dutch is the mandatory language requirement. We could then put a *numerus fixus* on the international track. Ideally there would not be a *numerus fixus* on the Dutch track. This would lead to a situation in which the course remains attractive for international students, while remaining accessible for all Dutch students, because there is no admission limit.

We therefore advocate the adaptation of the *numerus fixus* legislation and to make it possible to put a *numerus fixus* exclusively on the international track.

Some courses attract many non-EER students. If we could limit the number of non-EER students within a numerus fixus, we should be able to create a balanced international classroom.

In the public debate some suggest to simply refrain from providing English courses, as a means to restrict influx from internationals. I call it the nuclear option, with corresponding effects. To maintain our educational quality, we do need courses taught in English. Curriculum development, including its language, is an elaborate, long term investment. The offer has to be prepared and substantiated by the appropriate education committees and with the direct involvement of the democratic administrative bodies. And that is what we have to stand for: sufficient substantiation and legitimization by the powers prescribed by law. So leave the choice of language to the institution, with a burden of proof for the chosen language for each course.

This is not the topic of our conference today, but rest assured, language of provision is high on the agenda of our rectors, following our internationalization agenda.

As a fifth instrument for quality and regulating volumes we suggest increasing the autonomy of universities in differentiating college tuition fees. Regulation of influx can be reached by fixing various tuition fees, especially for non-EU students.

Finally, we can only maintain the advantages of the international classroom with proper regulation. Regulation will help universities to guard as well as enhance the quality of education – and to provide the proper care for all students, national and international, regarding housing and student facilities. As I illustrated earlier there is no one solution, no silver bullet. We need a toolkit with a variety of instruments.

This is a work conference. By 5 o'clock we hope to conclude with at least four concrete follow-up actions, recommendations or plans for each of today's themes. Recommendations aimed at pushing ourselves to the next level as Jurgen already suggested.

Before I conclude I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the VSNU and our moderator Jurgen Rienks for organizing this conference, together with Marjo Gallé of Erasmus University and Stephan Philipsen of Utrecht University. Stephan has been the advisor of the VSNU on the new legal toolkit.

I wish you all a very productive and enjoyable day. Let us keep in mind that Dutch education is *ex-cel-lent*. Among the best in the world. Much better than it was 20 or 30 years ago. Probably better and certainly more accessible than ever before. Let us make sure it stays that way.