

# Language Guideline\*

## 1 Background

Wageningen University & Research (WUR) is a leading academic and research institute specialising in life sciences. Our partnerships with acclaimed universities and research centres around the world have drawn a growing number of Dutch and international students and staff in recent years. With more than 100 nationalities represented in our WUR community, effective communication in both English and Dutch is crucial.

The primary goal of the 2014-2020 language policy was to ensure that all WUR staff reach a minimum English proficiency level. The introduction of English tests and training programmes increased language proficiency throughout the organisation. Overall, 66% of WUR employees had a proven sufficient command of the English language. Of those who had yet to reach the required proficiency level, 34% were enrolled in language courses. This new language policy aims to maintain that proficiency level by stressing the importance of English skills in the recruitment process and by developing custom training courses for staff members.

To achieve our ambitions as an international organisation, it is crucial that our employees have a good command of both **Dutch** and **English**. More than 60% of our employees are native Dutch speakers. As a result, most of our communication thus far has been in Dutch. However, as this information is equally relevant to our international employees, it's important that these documents and policies are translated into English as well. Integration into Dutch society is also important, as is attracting and retaining talent. For this reason, we offer all international employees and their partners access to Dutch language courses.

Language proficiency is crucial to effective communication at work. If we fail to improve on this, our international employees will miss out on important work-related information. This inspired us to add a key element to our language policy: the Guideline for a Supportive & Collaborative Working Environment.

*\* This language policy was initially adopted for the period from 2021 until and including 2024. The executive board has extended this period till the moment when a new policy will be implemented. This new policy will be the result of a collaborative process of all Dutch universities to implement new or adjusted policies at all universities*

## Language Guideline 2021-2026

For a Supportive & Collaborative working environment



This guideline was drafted with the aim of helping WUR employees reach the language level needed for communicating effectively at work and in social situations.

## 2 Objectives

By developing language guidelines and offering language courses, we hope to help everyone in our organisation reach the required proficiency level in either Dutch or English. Furthermore, we promote the importance of improving our organisation's overall level of professional, scientific and inclusive (interdepartmental) communication.

## 3 Principles of language guideline

This language guideline:

1. is in line with the ambitions of an international organisation;
2. is practical and feasible;
3. contributes to employee development (talent growth);
4. contributes to connecting and supporting employees and creating a cooperative working environment (talent retention).

## 4 Plan

### 4-1 Language level guidelines:

#### 4-1-1 English language skills:

- The English language guidelines were drawn up using the WU/DLO function matrix and colours. The level descriptions were based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR classification allows for a comparison with scores from Cambridge, IELTS, TOEFL and other international language tests. This guideline can be used for all four skills or for partial skills (e.g. in cases where only speaking skills are important);
- The job matrix offers a basic starting point ranging from +1 to -1, depending on the requirements and skills in a specific context (e.g. speaking skills are more important in some groups or teams than others);
- During the recruitment and selection phase, explicit attention must be paid to language proficiency based on the English language level guidelines. The English proficiency level required for a specific position must be clearly stated in the vacancy text;
- All candidates (internal & external) must be able to provide proof of English proficiency by means of an accredited certificate, as stated in the vacancy. If not, the relevant group or team must arrange for a language test at Wageningen into Languages to confirm the candidate's proficiency level.

#### 4-1-2 Dutch language skills:

WUR is an internationally oriented university located in the Netherlands. Mastery of the Dutch language will help non-Dutch speaking employees and their family members integrate into Dutch society. A bilingual work environment will foster mutual understanding among employees and help create an inclusive climate.

International employees and their partners will be given the opportunity to take Dutch language courses at WUR.

The Dutch language level guidelines were based on the NT2 State Exams (Dutch as a second language).

Passing these exams means the candidate is proficient enough in Dutch to work and/or study in the Netherlands. The NTW2 proficiency levels are outlined below:

Level A (Basic User)

A1: Beginner | A2: Elementary

Level B (Independent User)

B1: Intermediate | B2: Upper intermediate

Level C (Proficient User)

C1: Advanced | C2: Proficient (near native)

- The Education Executive Agency (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*, DUO) arranges the integration exam, which is available to applicants who reach A2 proficiency level.
- Vacancies must clearly state the Dutch proficiency requirements for research and education activities. All candidates (internal and external) must be able to provide proof of proficiency by means of a recognised certificate, as stated in the vacancy. If not, the relevant group or team must arrange for a language test at Wageningen in'to Languages to confirm the candidate's proficiency level.

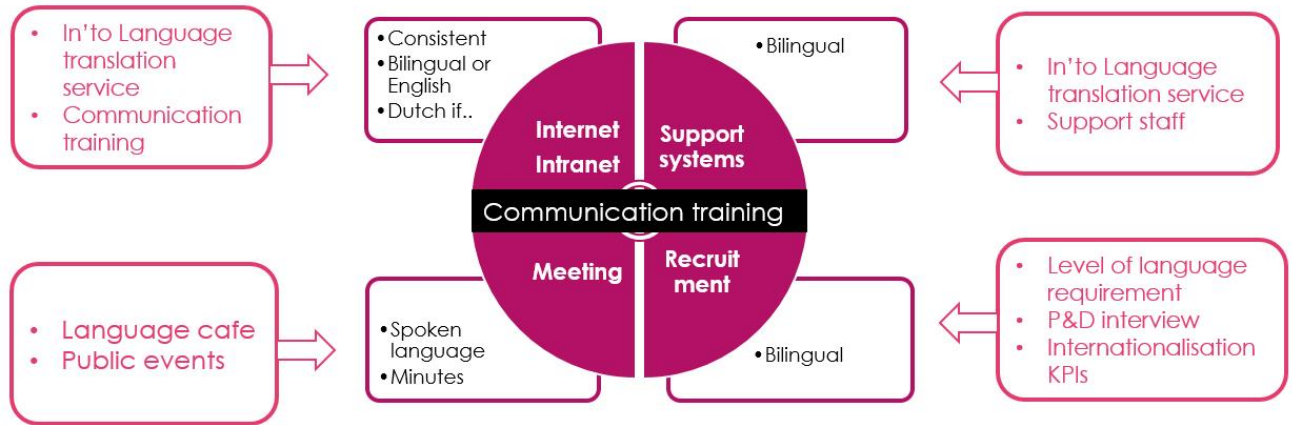
#### **4-1-3 Language in an inclusive and collaborative working environment**

Written and spoken communication is an important part of an inclusive, supportive and collaborative working environment. Ensuring that information remains consistent is the key to creating a level playing field with effective communication. This language guideline makes specific reference to the way language is used in different settings:

- Information must be consistent in both Dutch and English across all online platforms;
- Information intended for an international audience must be bilingual or English only. If the information is exclusively intended for Dutch-speaking employees, this must be clearly stated in English at the beginning of the text ('This is only offered in Dutch');
- Meetings must be conducted in English at all organisational levels, unless all participants are sufficiently fluent in Dutch;
- All meeting minutes must be recorded in English. Non-Dutch speaking participants/readers have the right to request an English version of Dutch minutes from the minutes taker or the relevant communications officer;
- Wageningen in'to Languages can be contacted at any time to translate documents from Dutch to English or English to Dutch;
- All vacancies must be published in English on the English website. The recruiter/HR department may also decide to publish it in Dutch on the Dutch website, as well as in other languages, if applicable;
- All WUR-wide training courses must be offered in both Dutch and English, with the English courses accounting for at least 50% of the options;
- All information and notifications from a service desk (HR, IT) must be bilingual or in English;
- All WUR-wide infrastructures (MyProject, Internet instructions, Brand Portal, MyDevelopment, ProQMe, digital payslips, Teamsoda, MyH) must be available in Dutch and English or have an English explanation;
- All WUR policy documents must be available in both Dutch and English;
- All management and relevant supporting documents (reports, numbers, overviews, finance reviews, legal advice, etc.) must be available in English. The document provider can decide whether a Dutch version is also required.

This language policy will be distributed throughout the organisation.

# Supportive & Collaborative Working Environment



## 4-2 Implementation

### 4-2-1 Language courses

#### 4-2-1-1 English language courses

The following English languages courses are available:

- Wageningen in'to Languages offers a range of language courses designed to help WUR employees improve their English proficiency, with a focus on effective communication (Table 1):

**Table 1. Wageningen in'to Languages English courses**

Course:	Proposal
Basic English Hospitality English Professional Skills in English Grammar & Vocabulary 1 & 2 Speaking Skills Advanced Speaking Skills	10 lessons x 1.5 hours Price: €555 Group size: 5-9 participants

(Consult the Wageningen in'to Languages website for up-to-date information)

- These courses must be arranged with Wageningen in'to Languages and will be paid for by the relevant group or team.
- Wageningen in'to Languages can develop specific courses for specific target groups (HR, Finance, Legal)
- Wageningen in'to Languages also offers online and custom courses for various target groups (Scientific Writing for professionals, Professional Writing, Lecturing Observation Service, Lecturing in the International Classroom)
- Cambridge courses are offered by partner Radboud in'to Languages in Nijmegen
- The time spent on English courses counts towards hours worked (unless agreed otherwise)
- Language courses will not be funded by the Training and Supervision Plan budget of PhD candidates nor by the employees personal educational budget.

#### 4-2-1-2 Dutch language courses

Dutch language course offered by Wageningen in'to Languages:

- Basic Dutch 1: from A0 to A1- (CEFR)
  - Basic Dutch 2: from A1- to A1 (CEFR)
  - Intermediate Dutch 1: Level on completion: A2 (CEFR)
  - Intermediate Dutch 2: Level on completion: Op weg naar B1 (CEFR)
  - Advanced Dutch 1: Level on completion: B1 (CEFR)
  - Advanced Dutch 2: Level on completion: Op weg naar B2 (CEFR)
- All WUR employees (including "non-contract employees" such as sandwich-PhD's) and their partners can participate in one of the Dutch courses offered by Wageningen in'to Languages (language level to be determined by an intake exam);
  - Wageningen in'to Languages will provide an annual overview of participant capacity for the five Dutch courses (detailed schedule and course capacity will be published on the website). Employees are free to choose any level, depending on availability;
  - The Dutch courses for employees and their partners will be paid for by the group or team on the condition that the participant obtains the required certificate upon completion of the course;
  - Language courses will not be funded by the Training and Supervision Plan budget of PhD candidates nor by the employees personal educational budget.
  - The time spent on Dutch courses counts towards hours worked (unless agreed otherwise);
  - Wageningen in'to Languages offers intensive Dutch courses for positions that require a specific proficiency level. The time it takes to reach this level can vary from two weeks to two months, with prices fluctuating from €3000 to €6000. These courses must be arranged with Wageningen in'to Languages and will be paid for by the relevant group or team.

#### **4-2-3 Additional facilities for implementation**

- The use of both Dutch and English will be promoted in various ways, including holding regular bilingual lunch meetings at Impulse and setting up a language café in collaboration with internal and external organisations;
- If the newly recruited employee/PhD candidate is unable to provide proof of proficiency as required by the vacancy, an online or offline intake exam can be arranged through Wageningen in'to Languages;
- The employee's desired proficiency level should be discussed in the P&D interview (taking into account peer/student evaluations) to determine which agreements should be made regarding duration, course type, assessment type, etc.;
- The participant will receive a certificate at the end of the course. Wageningen in'to Languages will publish an overview of its language courses every six months;
- Corporate HR will evaluate English and Dutch language courses each year and discuss the results with management;
- Wageningen in'to Languages offers communication courses that focus on professional, scientific and inclusive communication. Departments are encouraged to promote these courses to improve interdepartmental communication and team-building.

The Executive Board will review the language developments annually in relation to the KPIs of international employees in the science groups.

## **4- 3 Timeline and costs**

### **4-3-1 Timeline**

We propose implementing this language guideline for the period 2021-2024\*. We have made a start by consulting the managing directors and HR about this language guideline. We've identified key players, set priorities and developed possible courses. The next step is to publish the guideline within the organisation and develop implementation plans per science group. The priorities will depend on the possibilities within the departments. As with the previous language policy, interventions have yet to be planned. Given that recruiters are coordinated by C-HR, the recruitment measures will be implemented in 2022. When adjusting the systems, the relevant department will be consulted to set up a change plan (e.g. HR, IT and Communications).

\* The period has been extended until a new policy will be implemented (see above)