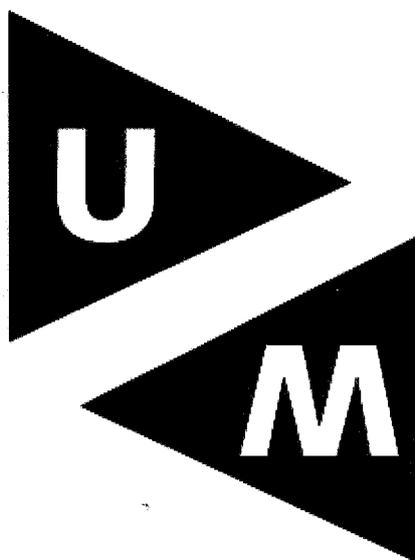

The Importance of Language Competences for Employers

Library and Languages Centre Maastricht University



1. Summary

This report explains the results of the research that has been conducted in order to find out how important language competencies are in a recruitment process of the most popular employers of the graduates of the Maastricht University. Next to that it describes to what extent these competencies influence decisions within this process. Furthermore it reveals that, in general, 60% of the participating employers assume language competences to be important in the recruitment process. However, this degree of importance does differ across the seven different industries that we have included within this research. For example, 90% of the producing/service firms assume language competences to be important, compared to only 23% of the hospitals & health institutions. Moreover, language competences seem to be the most important for graduates of the SBE faculty, and the least important for graduates of the department of knowledge engineering.

The largest part (47%) of the participating employers require university graduates to have a sufficient level of Dutch and English. Another part of the employers (38%) require university graduates to command only the Dutch language. Being able to solely speak and write English is sufficient for 10% of the companies. The remaining 5% of the employers require university graduates to speak at least three different languages. German and French apply as the most important third languages (24% and 17% respectively). When setting the requirements of language competences, employers particularly distinguish between functions. Obviously, functions with an international focus mostly require better language skills. Despite the fact that most employers do not relate many language competences with any extra competences, some employers associate it with positive qualities, such as high intelligence.

This research also elaborates on the fact that 62% of the participating employers link living abroad (e.g. via exchange or internship) with a higher level of local language skills. However, various industries have different opinions concerning this topic. Also, in total 86% of the employers do not require any certified proof of language competences. The remaining 14% mostly requires such a language certificate for only a few specific functions.

Eventually, this report will try to infer some implications of the results acquired for improvement of the language policy of Maastricht University is currently administering.

Unipartners, Michiel van Dongen en Heleen Hermans
December 2012

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3. Introduction

A few months ago a new initiative has been launched in order to gauge the level of language competences of the teaching staff, the students, and the partners of Maastricht University. This research specifically explores the current language skills of the above mentioned parties and the influence that it has on their daily activities. Within this research, special emphasis is given to the overall issue of what level of language skills should be present and to what extent this is important.

As part of this investigation, the University Library of Maastricht, in collaboration with the organization of the Taalvisie Nota, hired Junior Consultants of UniPartners in order to formulate an answer to the following question: “What do the most popular employers among the graduates of Maastricht University find important concerning language competences?”

In order to answer this research question, a set of sub questions has been composed:

1. How important are language competences in a recruitment process and to what extent these competencies influence decisions within this process?
2. Which general language competences do employers expect from their employees and which languages are decisive?
3. Do employers consider the ability to speak a third language important?
4. Are there specific foreign languages that employers value more than others?
5. Do employers differentiate across functions or study background with respect to their expectations concerning language competences?
6. Do employers connect living abroad (e.g. via exchange or an internship) with a higher level of proficiency in the local language?
7. To what extent is a certified proof of language proficiency (e.g. ACTFL certificates) important in the recruitment process?
8. Do employers associate the ability to speak multiple foreign languages with other positive qualities?
9. Do employers expect a graduate from an internationally oriented university, such as Maastricht University to have a higher level of language competences than graduates of more national oriented universities? Do they expect

graduates from international universities to have enjoyed more language education during their studies?

Before this report elaborates on the topic at hand, a detailed explanation will be provided in order to clarify the research methodology that has been set up. After explaining the research methodology used, the acquired results will be used to answer these subquestions and make some recommendations concerning the university language policy based on these results.

4. Research Methodology

To attain more insight in the role of language competences in the recruitment and selection process, many popular employers of UM graduates were contacted. For these interviews, we asked to speak with the employer's university graduate recruiter. Eventually, a number of 58 recruiters responded from the 128 persons contacted.

In the first stage of this research, the list with employers to contact was composed. This was done on basis of a database provided by the Alumni Office of Maastricht University with anonymized data of where alumni of Maastricht University currently are working. Using Excel, a frequency table for the total database was made showing for which employers most UM graduates worked. Next to that, separate frequency tables per faculty were created such that every faculty would be represented in our sample. The faculties which were specified in the database and were therefore also used to categorize the data were:

1. Maastricht University School of Business and Economics
2. Faculty of Law
3. Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences
4. Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience
5. Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
6. Maastricht Graduate School of Governance
7. Department of Knowledge Engineering
8. University College Maastricht

Due to the small amount of participants in the category "Maastricht Graduate School of Governance" and "University College Maastricht" the data was too dispersed to indicate the most important employers for these faculties, which were therefore not considered in the composition of the sample.

Additionally, to ensure that also employers important for international students were represented in the sample, advice from Mrs. Poeth, the faculty alumni coordinator of the SBE, was sought. She indicated which employers were important especially for German students. Unfortunately, only a very small part of these foreign employers were willing to respond, and therefore it is very hard to draw specific conclusions for these foreign-based firms separately.

Using the acquired data, a list with 100 popular employers was composed and all these employers were contacted and asked to participate in the research. For each employer it was indicated for which faculties it was important. Also, they were categorized in the following sectors:

1. Hospitals & Health Institutions
2. Consultancy
3. Financial Sector
4. Government Institutions
5. Universities & Other Higher Education
6. Producing & Service Firms
7. Law firms & Institutions
8. Others

As too few employers were included in the category “others”, and it is hard to draw meaningful conclusions for this sector which includes no clear type of employer, this category will not be included in the analysis per sector.

The 100 selected employers were contacted and asked the questions which can be found in the appendix. A Dutch and English telephone script was used; however, in most cases the Dutch telephone script was sufficient. Both scripts are included in the Appendix.

Due to the low response rate, the list had to be extended to get a sufficient amount of respondents. Using the same frequency tables, an extra 26 employers were selected, which led to an eventual total of 58 respondents out of the 126 contacted firms: a response rate of 46%. The final list of total contacted employers and the list with successfully contacted employers can be found in the Appendix. The results acquired through these interviews were used to answer the research questions indicated before.

5. General Importance of Language Competences in the Recruitment Process

To determine what role language competences play in the recruitment process the employers were asked how important language competences are in general in the recruitment and selection process; what weight do they attach to language competences in the general recruitment and selection decisions. The following results came out:

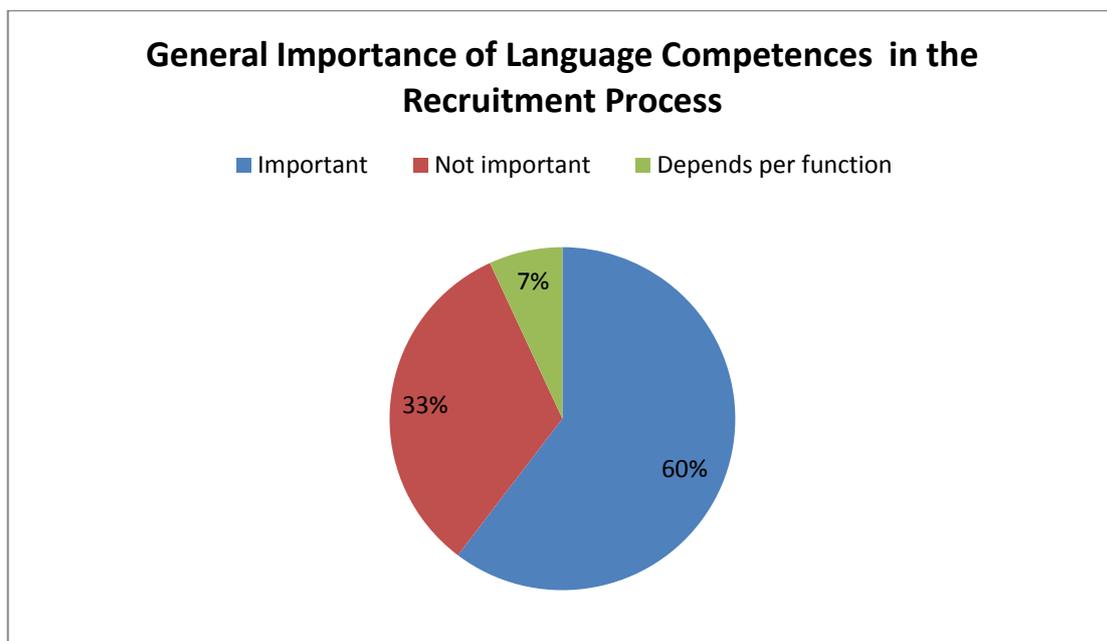


Figure 1: The general influence of language competences in the recruitment process

As can be seen in figure 1, the majority of the employers found language competences important, and one third of the employers did not consider it important. Of course, it can be assumed that also these employers demand some level of language competency. However, they do not look at this specifically in the selection procedure as they assume that all applicants already have the required level. There were also some firms for which the importance of language competences differed per function to such extent that they could not indicate a general level of importance. Thus, from this figure it can be concluded that to most employers language competences are important. To be able to make more meaningful conclusions the importance per sector will be evaluated. Table 1 shows the results per sector.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Not Important</i>	<i>Function dependent</i>
1. Hospitals & Health Institutions	23,%	69%	8%
2.Consulting	67%	33%	0%
3. Financial Sector	86%	14%	0%
4. Government Institutions	46%	36%	18%
5. Universities & other higher education	50%	25%	25%
6. Product & Service Firms	90%	0%	10%
7. Law firms & Institutions	60%	40%	0%

Table 1: General importance of language competences in the recruitment process per sector

It is remarkable that language competences are less important in the recruitment process for hospitals and health institutions. This makes sense, as all employers in this section were Dutch and their patients will normally speak Dutch. As the average health science student will have the required level of Dutch needed, it does not play a big role in the recruitment process. Furthermore, language competences are important in the financial sector. This is probably due to the contact with clients and reports that have to be written for which language competency must be impeccable. Additionally, producing and service firms attach a really high importance to language competences. The employers in the sample in this sector are all big multinational players, as these are the firms in which UM graduates are often employed. They probably all operate on an international level which increases the importance of language competences immensely. In the law sector, importance of language competences is mainly connected to the ability to write the applicable language flawless, as small mistakes in writing may have big impacts in legal cases.

To see whether there are clear differences per faculty, the results are also evaluated per faculty. The amount of employers associated with a specific faculty indicated that language competences play an important role in the recruitment and selection process.

Faculty	Important	Not Important	Function dependent
SBE	70%	22%	8%
Faculty of Law	58%	29%	23%
Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences	55%	39%	6%
Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience	48%	41%	11,%
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	80%	20%	0%
Department of Knowledge Engineering	50%	0%	50%

Table 2: General importance of language competences per faculty

The results in the table show that language competences are relatively important for SBE and FASOS students. This is reasonable as both subsamples contain many multinational firms. For the other faculties there seem to be no clear implications. This is probably due to the dispersed employer base of these faculties; graduates of those faculties work in many different sectors. Therefore, more sensible conclusions can be made by examining the results per sector. Moreover, the results for FASOS and DKE should be treated with caution because of the limited subsample size.

6. Generally Expected Language Competences

From the previous section, it can be concluded that most employers find language competences important. To be able to draw more meaningful conclusions the employers were also asked which general language competences they expect from their employees. The result can be found in figure 2 below.

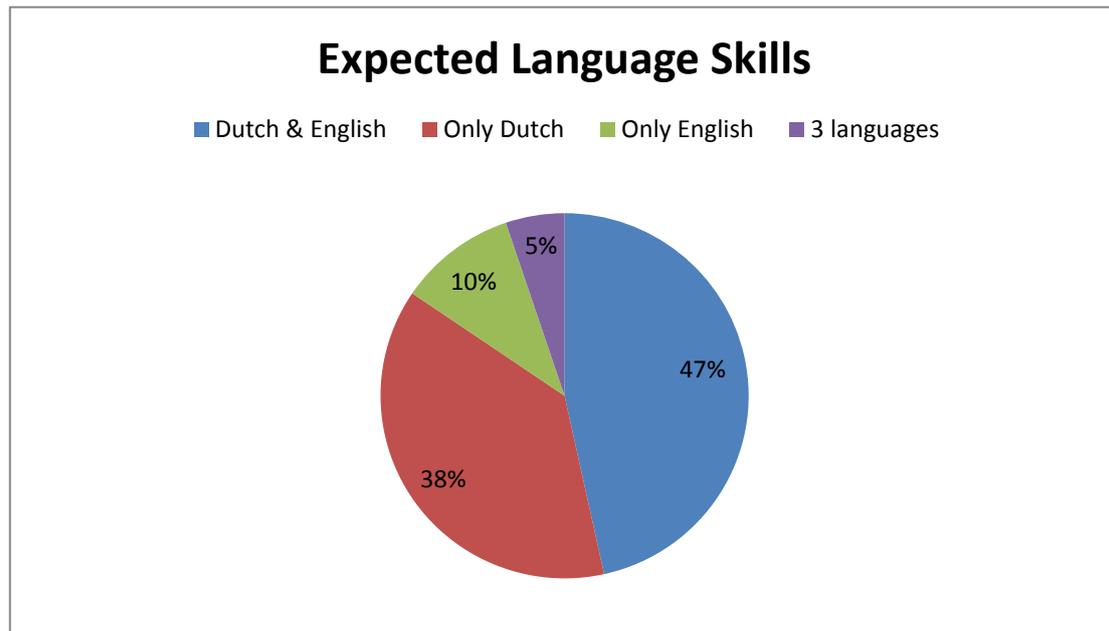


Figure 2: Generally expected language skill by employers

The major part of the employers expects their employees to be able to speak and write both English and Dutch. There is also a substantial percentage that only expects competence in Dutch. However, we found that 73% of the employers who indicated this, still value competency in English as well. Nevertheless, they do not automatically expect it. The small percentage that only expects English is made up by the most internationally oriented firms in our sample, mostly service and producing firms. However, also in this case we found that 67% of the employers, who indicated this, still appreciated competence in Dutch as well. The 5% employers which require three languages contains the two international-oriented government institutions in our sample, namely the European Parliament and the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs, and also one financial institution. From this it can be concluded that for students aspiring a career on the EU-level or in foreign affairs, language competencies are especially important. Table 3 below sheds more light on the expected language skills per sector.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Dutch & English</i>	<i>Only Dutch</i>	<i>Only English</i>	<i>3 Languages</i>
1. Hospitals & Health Institutions	38%	54%	8%	0%
2. Consulting	67%	33%	0%	0%
3. Financial Sector	29%	57%	0%	14%
4. Government Institutions	27%	55%	0%	18%
5. Universities & other higher education	25%	50%	25%	0%
6. Product & Service Firms	60%	0%	40%	0%
7. Law firms & Institutions	80%	20%	0%	0%

Table 3: Generally expected language competences by employers per sector

As could be expected health institutions and government institutions largely only require Dutch. However, as noted before there is also a substantial part of government institutions that does require competency of three languages; these are the internationally oriented government institutions mentioned before. All product & service firms require English; this represents the multinational nature of most of the firms in this sector included in this subsample. Remarkably, law firms & institutions also largely require both English & Dutch. The 80% represents all the lawyer firms in our sample. Thus, even though Dutch is most important, lawyer firms still expect their employees to be able to speak English as well. Most hospitals and health institutions just expect Dutch. However, academic hospitals indicated that they often also expect at least a basic knowledge in English, as most academic literature used for training is in English. Also, in the research department which some of the academic hospitals in our sample have English is the most important language, though still a basic proficiency in Dutch is required.

To further evaluate the decisiveness of these expectations, the employers were asked for Dutch and English separately whether competence in this language is decisive in the recruitment and selection process. Results can be found below:

	<i>Dutch</i>	<i>English</i>
Decisive	79%	40%
Not decisive	12%	46%
Depends per function	9%	14%

Table 4: Decisiveness of competence in Dutch and competence in English in the recruitment process

As can be seen in table 4, competence in Dutch is for many employers decisive. As most employers in our sample are based in the Netherlands and use Dutch as language on the workplace, these results are not very surprising. However, it does have

important implications for international students aspiring to find a job in the Netherlands. For these students, it is very recommendable to learn to speak Dutch as this will enlarge their pool of possible employers significantly. English is decisive for a substantial part of the employers; therefore, it is also recommendable that every student acquires competence in English. Nevertheless, as English is the common language at Maastricht University in general it can be assumed that competence in English of its students is sufficient.

Eventually, the decisiveness of these two languages per sector is evaluated.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Dutch Decisive</i>	<i>English Decisive</i>
1. Hospitals & Health Institutions	92%	38%
2. Consulting	78%	22%
3. Financial Sector	86%	0%
4. Government Institutions	91%	27%
5. Universities & other higher education	50%	50%
6. Product & Service Firms	50%	80%
7. Law firms & Institutions	100%	60%

Table 5: Decisiveness of competence in Dutch and competence in English in the recruitment process per sector

In table 5 we can see, although important for all sectors, that in particular sectors competence in Dutch is very decisive. As expected it is decisive for all law firms & institutions, as they need excellent competence in Dutch in their daily professional practice. Competence in Dutch is also extremely important for most hospitals & health institutions, which is again reasonable as contact with patients will generally be in Dutch. Additionally, competence in Dutch is decisive for more than 90% of the government institutions. This result is also reasonable as the regulation, with which most of these institutions work, will be in Dutch. Nevertheless, one should take in mind that this is not the case for the government institutions on the EU-level which are also a big employer of UM graduates.

7. The Role of a Third Language

Though only few employers require a third language from their employees, they may see the ability to speak and write a third language as a positive quality which is desirable. Therefore, the employers were asked whether they attach value to competency in a third language. The answers were quite divided as 45% indicated that they do attach value to competency in a third language, but the remaining 55% indicated that they do not attach value to this ability. Looking at the results per sector gives more informative results, as can be seen in Table 6.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Added Value</i>	<i>No Added Value</i>
1. Hospitals & Health Institutions	31%	69%
2. Consulting	33%	67%
3. Financial Sector	14%	85%
4. Government Institutions	55%	45%
5. Universities & Other Higher Education	25%	75%
6. Product & Service Firms	80%	20%
7. Law firms & Institutions	60%	40%

Table 6: Value for employers of competence in a third language

Once more, product & service firms score the highest in this category probably due to their multinational nature as explained before. Remarkably also law firms score high in this category, even though one would expect they do not use a third language very often in their profession. This suggests that law firms do consider the competency to speak a third language as sign of other desirable qualities. Also remarkable, the major part of government institutions attaches value to a third language. This is partly due to the internationally oriented government institutions included in our sample. However, several employers in this sector indicated that they sometimes have international projects, so therefore, even though it is not generally required, the ability to speak an extra foreign language is considered positive.

8. Competence in Specific Foreign Languages

After establishing that almost half of the employers attach value to competency in a general third language, it is interesting to research whether there are some specific foreign languages which are especially valued by employers. The employers were asked whether there is a specific language next to the general expected language knowledge that is valued higher than others. Some employers indicated multiple foreign languages. The results are shown in table 7.

<i>Language</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
German	24,%
French	17%
Chinese	3,5%
Spanish	7%
Turkish	2%
Arabic	2%
Italian	2%

Table 7: Percentage of employers that values proficiency in the indicated foreign language extra over other foreign languages

As can be seen in table 7, almost a quarter of the employers especially values German as a third language. Next to German, also French scores quite well. Thus, these languages are most recommendable for students to study as a third language. Unfortunately, due to the limited size of the sample it is not possible to split up these figures for separate sectors, as there would be too few firms which value a specific third language to make reliable conclusions. The general impression from the sample suggests that there is no clear pattern. For example, the employers valuing German are spread over 6 different sectors. The only sector not containing any employer valuing German more is the financial sector, which did not attach much value to competency in a third language in the first place, as was seen in the previous section.

9. Differentiation across Function or Study Background

Since most of the employers that have participated in this research offer a wide range of different job vacancies, the research aimed to find out to what extent employers differentiate the language requirements within the recruitment process across different functions. Also, it is investigated whether employers expect a different level of language proficiency from students from different studies. A substantial part of the employers indicated that they have functions for which more language competences are required and then they will pay more attention to them. However, they do not hire students from specific studies based on the higher required level of language competences. Furthermore, some recruiters indicated that they expected higher proficiency if the word “international” was mentioned in the study name, or when the study was taught in English. However, most did not differentiate between specific studies in their expectations concerning language competences.

Hospitals & health institutions do not differentiate across different studies. Almost all of these medical institutions mentioned that they only hire doctors and in some exceptional cases a few lawyers. As the language of instruction in all these employers is Dutch, the same rules apply to all potential employees. As has been mentioned earlier, a basic level of English is also required within these employers.

The same logic applies to the financial industry. Since all these companies mostly operate on a national scale and contact with local clients is extremely important, all job vacancies require a perfect command of the Dutch language.

Nevertheless, 22% of the consultancy firms do differentiate across function and study program. The most important distinction is made between nationally oriented and internationally oriented studies. University graduates that apply for a job at the international department of these companies are required to have better English competences. Whenever the study background of a job applicant has an international focus (e.g. International Business), recruiters of these companies expect a higher level of English language competences. All other consultancy companies do not differentiate across functions or study background. For every vacancy Dutch and a basic level of English is required.

None of the governmental organizations that participated in this research differentiate language requirements across different study backgrounds. Graduates from very different studies apply for jobs within these organizations, and employers in this subsample expect them all to have roughly the same level of language competency. Therefore, smaller governmental organizations usually differentiate per department. For example, the department of culture of a Dutch province uses different rules than other departments within these organizations. A recruiter of a Dutch ministry explained that all potential employees have to pass the same language test; they base their judgment concerning language competences on this test and certainly not on study background. Thus, there is no distinction between specific studies when more language competences are required. The same result applies for all functions within the European governmental institution that participated in this research. The only exception within this organization is the language requirements for translators.

On the other hand, all universities and other higher education institutions do differentiate across studies and functions. Two higher education institutions (hogescholen) specifically demand better language skills for international and language education functions. Also, they indicated that they do expect students with international study backgrounds to have a higher level of language competences. Also, both universities expect higher language skills from internationally educated graduates. For example, a recruiter of one university mentioned that language requirements are lower for Dutch law compared to international law.

Most producing and service companies do not differentiate across functions or study background. The main reason for this is that all functions require the same set of language skills: Dutch and English. Some other producing companies demand some extra language skills for certain functions. For example, two recruiters explained that the headquarters of their companies were located in Germany and France respectively. As a result, some management functions require extra language skills in these languages. Also, as was the case in many other industries, as soon as the word 'international' appears in the name of a study, the level of expectation rises, and higher proficiency in at least English is expected.

Most of the law companies which were involved in this research make a distinction between function or study background. The reason for this is that they only hire university graduates from the faculty of law. Moreover, these functions require an excellent level of Dutch, but only a basic level of English language skills. Only one lawyer firm indicated that they expect a higher proficiency in Dutch of graduates Dutch law, as small mistakes can lead to big consequences in their profession.

10. The Influence of Living Abroad on Language Competence Expectations

As has been mentioned before, one of the subquestions of this report is to investigate to what extent employers associate staying abroad through an exchange or internship to increased local knowledge skills. Many courses at Maastricht University offer the possibility for students to study on an international university by means of an exchange program. Beyond the fact that students have the opportunity to gain general experience within an unknown- and international environment, they are often exposed to new languages. Students are given the opportunity to learn this specific language through a language course during the exchange period. When a student feels the need to improve its local language skills before his stay abroad, Maastricht University offers a tremendous amount of language courses. In many cases this is even recommended as numerous international universities do not have English as their official language.

In order to find out whether employers link a former exchange period of a University graduate to an increased set of local language skills, this topic was discussed with the contacted recruiters. Figure 3 show that 62% of the respondents do connect living abroad with a higher level of knowledge of the local language.

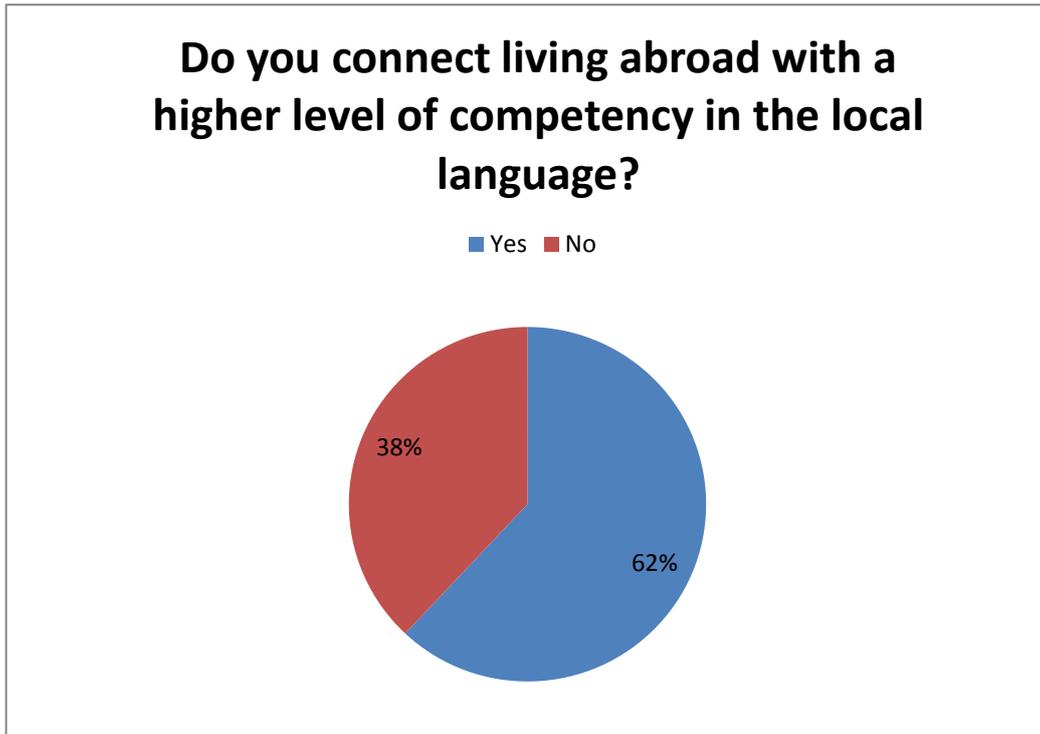


Figure 3: Percentage of employers that connects a period of living abroad with a higher level of competency in the local language

However, it is very interesting to study the differences in opinion across different sectors. Results are shown in table 8.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1. Hospitals & Health Institutions	54%	46%
2. Consulting	67%	33%
3. Financial Sector	71%	29%
4. Government Institutions	22%	78%
5. Universities & other higher education	75%	25%
6. Product & Service Firms	80%	20%
7. Law firms & Institutions	80%	20%

Table 8: Percentage of employers that connects a period of living abroad with a higher level of competency in the local language – results shown for different faculties.

Many local health institutions attach no values to an exchange period because it is not relevant for the functions that they offer to university graduates. But despite the general irrelevance of international language skills for local health institutions, most of them agree that an exchange period can contribute to the personal development of a student. It is mainly the hospitals that do link an exchange period to increased language proficiency. They find an exchange period especially important since medicine students (also psychology) are able to expand their practical knowledge in other countries. Although the medical world is fairly universal, during semesters

abroad medicine students can obtain knowledge that is not available at the local university.

Companies within the consultancy sectors tend to link exchange periods to improved local language skills more often. 67% of the participating consultancy firms answered this question affirmatively. A recruiter of one of these companies mentioned that this is especially the case for students who have lived in an English speaking country. Another big Dutch consultancy firm mentioned that on curriculum vitae, an abroad period is actually preferred over a statement that one can speak a foreign language excellently. Language skills will certainly be improved in foreign countries, but many consultancy firms agree that it is even more important that it shows that a student is able to adapt to unknown areas and situations. In addition to these positive answers, a few consultancy firms argued that, in their experience, most students have not acquired any local language skills during an exchange period.

Table 8 also shows that 71% of the banking and insurance firms agree upon the fact that an exchange period increases a student's local language skills. A big Dutch insurance company mentioned that an exchange period is one of the requirements when selecting university graduates for their job openings. Others said that though it is a possibility, they do not automatically believe that a person has gained and maintained local language skills. Two other insurance companies indicated that even though they have this association, an abroad experience is absolutely not applicable to their recruitment process because they have a 100% Dutch language policy.

Governmental organizations generally see less correlation between an exchange period abroad and improved local language skills. All municipalities that we have contacted agree upon the fact that it is not relevant during their recruitment process. It is interesting to see that as the size of a governmental institution increases (e.g. from a municipality to a province and to a European institution), the relevance of an exchange period increases as well. For example, a Dutch province mentioned that they link a period abroad to higher language skills and that this is very important for some international oriented functions within their organization. A European institution that was contacted mentioned that they only link an exchange period to improved language skills if it has resulted in a university language certificate.

However, another large portion of the governmental institution that we have contacted, do not link an exchange period to improved language skills.

The universities and other higher education institutions which are popular employers across Maastricht University's alumni, mostly agree that exchange periods lead to increased local language knowledge. Only one Dutch higher education institution disagreed. The others indicated that they actually have exchange programs themselves in order to stimulate students and graduates to increase their local language skills.

The producing and service companies that have participated in this research are mainly international oriented employers. 80% of these companies (see table 8), which are especially popular among SBE graduates, argue that they believe an exchange period in another country leads to an increased level of local language skills. A well known transportation company mentioned that when they are recruiting for a function with future German contacts, a student with an exchange background in Berlin will have a priority over all other candidates. Some other companies agree upon the fact that it leads to improved language skills, but it does not give an alumni an advantage over other candidates during the recruitment process. A recruiter from a German multinational believes that local language knowledge may be improved in some exceptional cases, but they want to test this knowledge before they believe it. She mentioned that they hire many German graduates that have been studying in the Netherlands, but that only a few of them can speak proper Dutch.

Despite the fact that many law firms and courts immediately mentioned that it is not really relevant for them, they mostly agree that an exchange period increases local language knowledge. One law firm mentioned that they link any international experience to improved language skills. They mentioned that an international girl/boyfriend can also serve as an example here. Another law firm only links an exchange to language skills if it is explicitly mentioned in the curriculum vitae. The only law firm that does not link an exchange to improved language skills, does attach value to the general international experience.

11. Proof of Language Proficiency

The presence of a sufficient amount of language competences has proven to be an important factor in the recruitment process of many employers that have participated in this research. Obviously, university graduates can indicate that they have specific language skills on their curriculum vitae. However, in many cases it is hard for employers to verify or test these language competences. For this reason, one might expect that employers value a certified proof of an alumni's ability to speak a foreign language. For this reason, the recruiters of all participating employers were asked to what extent a certified proof of language competences is important in the recruitment process. ACTFL-certificates, Cambridge English certificates or any proof of language proficiency guaranteed by a university might serve as an example here.

Although the answered to this question varied widely, it was possible to apply these answers to the following scale:

1. A certified proof of language competences is required in all/almost all cases.
2. A certified proof of language competences is required for certain functions.
3. A certified proof of language competences is advantageous, but not required.
4. A certified proof of language competences is not required.

The general results to this question are depicted in figure 4.

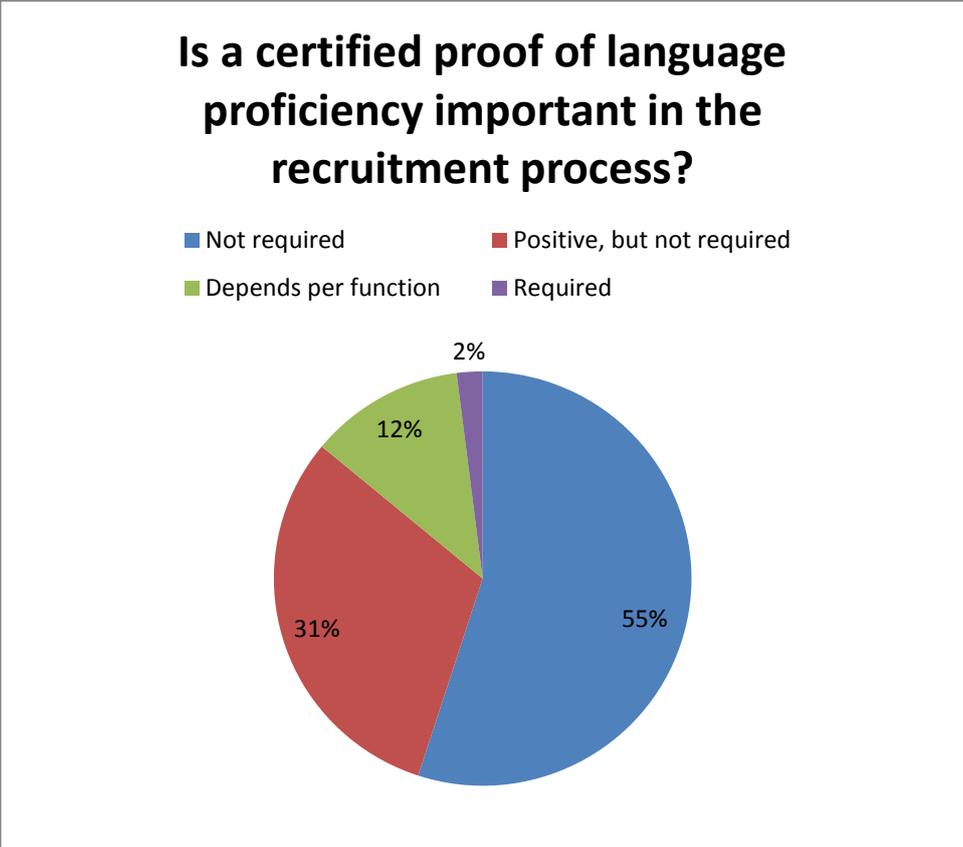


Figure 4: The importance of a certified proof of language proficiency in the recruitment process

Although one might expect that a certified proof in many cases will at least be positive, more than 50% of all participating companies attach no value to a certified proof. As will be seen at a later stage, only 1 out of the 58 participating employers demands a certified proof during the recruitment process. Only few recruiters (12%) mentioned that certified proofs are demanded in exceptional cases. Often this involves functions which are going to be in close contact with specific foreign countries. Many other companies (31%) do not have certified proofs of language skills as a requirement, but they do see it as a positive sign if an applicant can provide it.

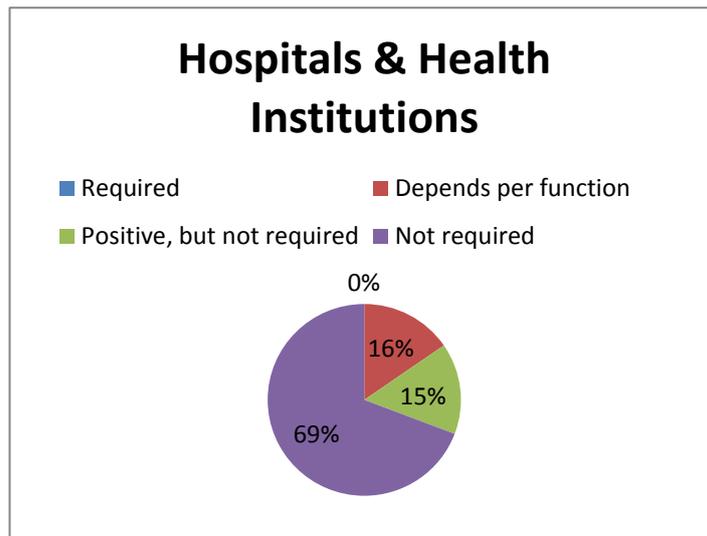


Figure 5: The importance of a certified proof of language proficiency in the recruitment process for hospitals and health institutions

Hospitals & health institutions generally do not require certified proof. Some indicate they test proficiency of Dutch themselves in the interviews with the applicants. Some require a certified proof of proficiency in Dutch for international applicants.

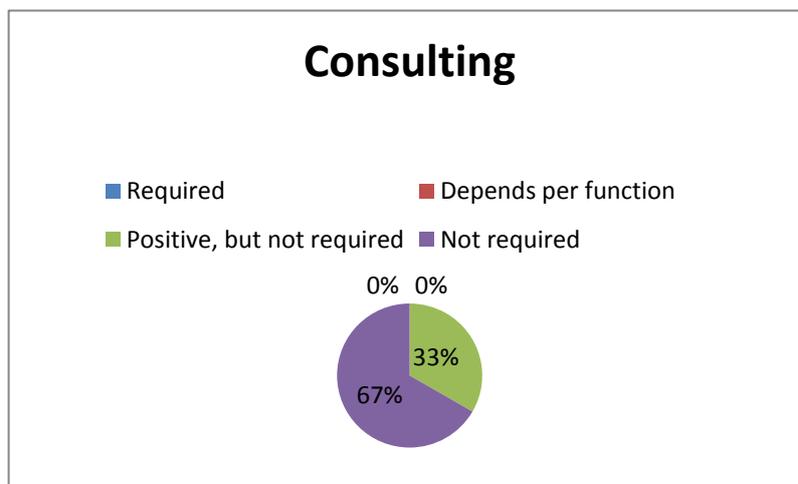


Figure 6: Importance of a certified proof of language proficiency in the recruitment process for consulting firms.

It is also interesting to emphasize the fact that none of the consultancy firms that we have interviewed requires a language certificate during the recruitment process. Figure 6 shows that two third of all participating consultancy firms do not value language certificates in any case. One of the recruiters of these companies mentioned that he prefers international experience over a certified proof. Some recruiters mentioned that being able to speak and understand a language is different from making an exam after a certain period of studying. Some other companies explained

that they perceive a language certificate as something positive, but that they would never prefer a university graduate over another candidate for this reason.

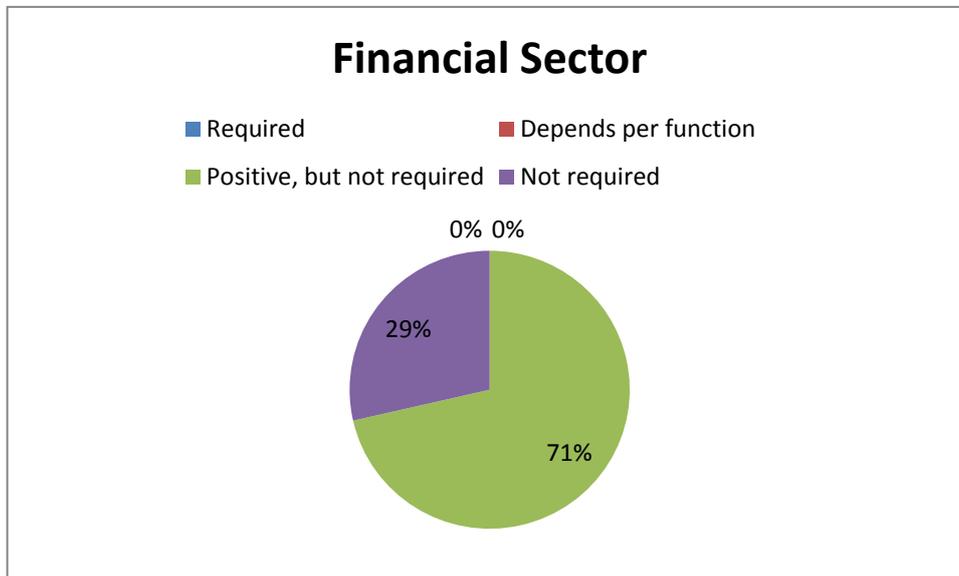


Figure 7: Importance of a certified proof of language proficiency in the recruitment process for the financial sector

Within financial sector a certified proof of language competences generally seems to be positive. However, none of the participating employers within this industry require a language certificate. A Dutch insurance company explained that they do value these certificates, but that they also have an own language test for potential new employees. On the basis of this test it is determined whether a university graduate has sufficient language competences. A private banking company explained that they do value these certificates, but that they always first check whether this person really attended this language course. Only one insurance company mentioned that they do not take these certificates into account since they are a purely Dutch company.

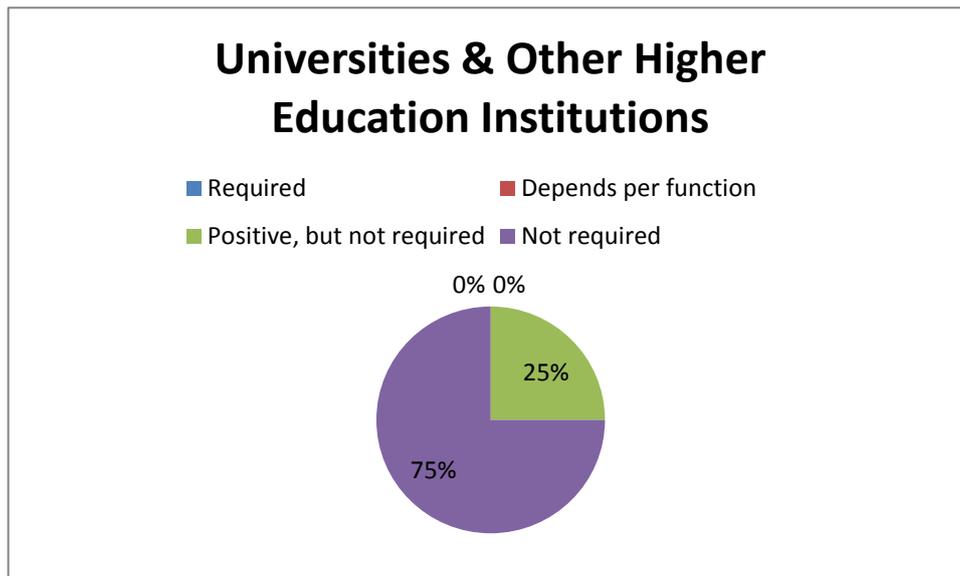


Figure 8: Importance of a certified proof of language proficiency in the recruitment process for universities and other higher education institutions

Figure 8 shows that opinions concerning language certificates differ among the different governmental employers that we have interviewed. Two governments (i.e. a Dutch ministry which is internationally focused and a European governmental institution) have the possession of a language certificate as a requirement when recruiting university graduates. Both institutions emphasize the fact that certificates provided by the university are always preferred over other certificates. For some job vacancies at two municipalities of big cities in the surrounding country of Maastricht language certificates are also required. In this case these job vacancies involve maintaining foreign relationships. All other governmental institutions do not value any certified proof for language competences.

For those university graduates who are planning to work at a university or college, certified proof of language competences does not seem to be very important. Most of these employers do not value language certifications. This is mostly because these employers presume that the language skills of a university graduate are sufficiently developed.

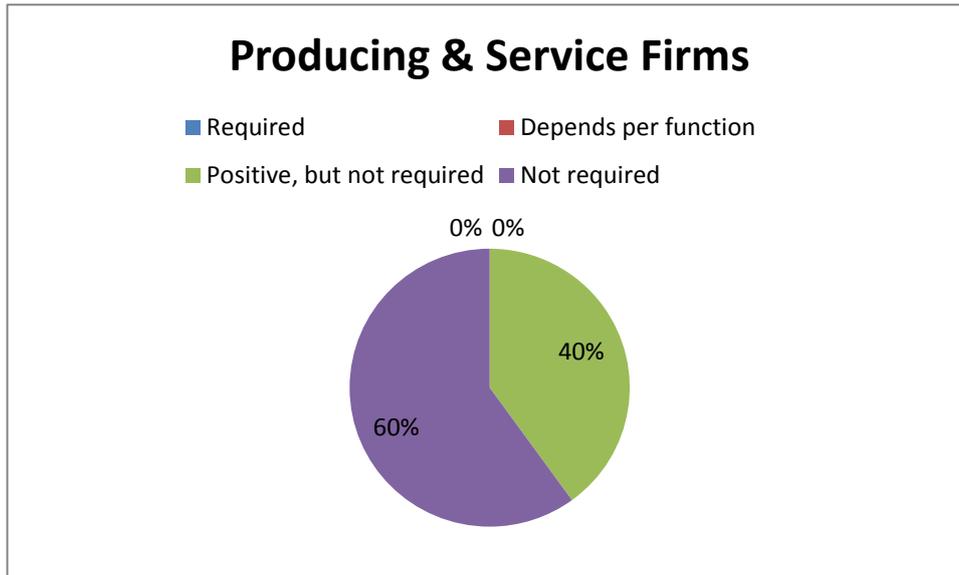


Figure 9: Importance of a certified proof of language proficiency in the recruitment process for producing and service firms

None of the participating producing and service companies has a certified proof of language competences as a requirement during their recruitment processes. A few of them actually do not value these certificates at all. Some of the recruiters explained that they perform the job interview in English in order to find out whether a university graduate has a sufficient level of language skills. Other companies have a language test included within their assessment procedure which all university graduates have to go through before they can start working for these companies. A recruiter of a well known energy providing company from the Netherlands explained that he would prefer a person with recent practical experience with a specific language over a person who has obtained a certified proof in this language a few years ago.

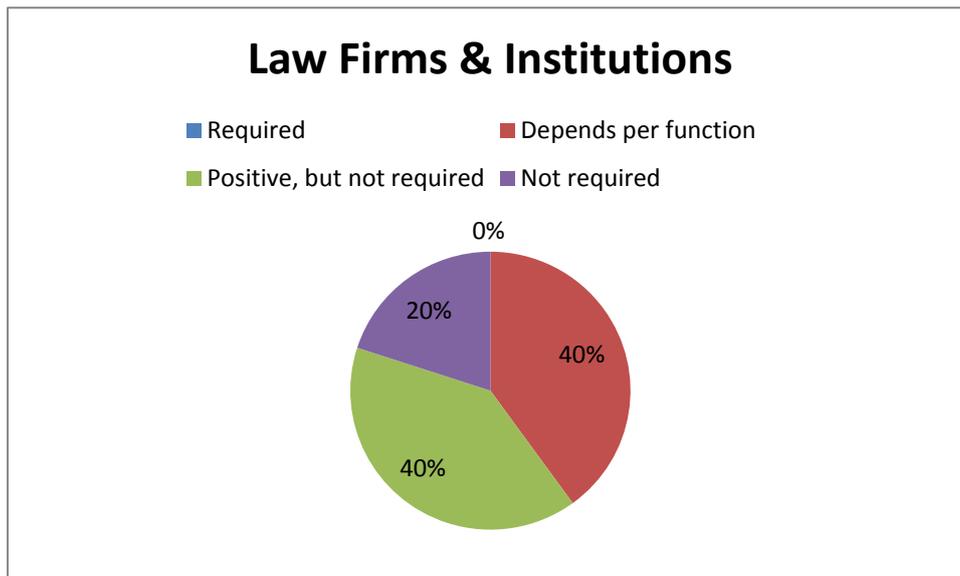


Figure 10: Importance of a certified proof of language proficiency in the recruitment process law firms and institutions

Two law firms that participated in this research mentioned that they sometimes do require a language certificate from a university graduate when they apply for a job. However, in both cases this is fairly rare and only applies to functions that have an international focus. Two other law firms, which require perfect English skills from its new employees, do not value these certificates because they rather test someone's skills themselves. The only tribunal that was included in this research indicated that language certificates are not relevant for their functions.

12. Associations with other competences

Beyond the fact that the ability to speak a second foreign language next to English; language competences offer a lot of practical possibilities. One might also see this ability as a signal of certain other competences. For this reason we have intended to find out what other competences might be associated with second foreign language competences. The most frequently cited competence is that it shows that a person is able to adapt him/herself to different and unknown situations and processes. Another frequently heard statement is that being able to speak multiple languages is mostly equivalent to a high level of intelligence. Other characteristics that were mentioned to have a connection with an above average ability to speak foreign languages included:

1. It shows commitment
2. It shows that someone excels in something
3. It is an indicator for good communication skills
4. It shows that someone is interested in other people
5. It shows that someone has gone the extra mile during his/her studies
6. It shows multidimensional skills
7. It shows versatility
8. It shows a significant amount of perseverance

Approximately 53% of the employers indicated that associated a high level of language competences with other positive qualities. However, one recruiter indicated the ability of speaking too many languages might be associated with fewer skills in the beta domain. The other of the half of the employers indicated not to have other associations.

13. Language Levels at International Universities

After having studied the importance of language competences in the recruitment process when graduates search for a new job, it is interesting to investigate whether employers expect a graduate from an international university, such as Maastricht University to have higher language competences. Moreover, do these employers expect that they have received more language education than students from more national universities?

Many recruiters mentioned that they do not automatically assume that the level of language competences of a university graduate is sufficient. In many of these cases, university graduates have to prove their language skills by means of an assessment during the recruitment period. When such an assessment is not passed sufficiently, many of these employers will continue their search to more capable university graduates. Only a few employers offer additional language training if this graduate scores sufficiently on all other areas of the assessment. However, across all industries, almost every employer thinks it is only logical that a university graduate has acquired a sufficient level of Dutch and/or English language competences during his/her studies. Many employers seem to assume that the level of English language competences has been improved over the past ten years because many Master tracks are taught in English nowadays.

Around 20% of the interviewed employers do not expect a graduate from an international university to have higher language competences than graduates from more national oriented universities. However, a vast majority of the participating employers do believe that the level of language competences is higher for these university graduates. They especially believe that the level of English language skills is better compared to 'normal' university graduates. Regular exchange periods and a great amount of collaboration with international co-students are often cited as the main reason for these improved skills. A recruiter of a well known law company indicated that they are very satisfied with the level of international language skills of former students of Maastricht University, especially if compared with other Universities in the Netherlands.

A small half of the employers do not expect that this improved level of English skills go hand in hand with education in more foreign languages. About 40% of the participating employers do expect that students of international universities receive more language education than other students.

14. Recommendations

The majority of employers indicate that language competences are important in the recruitment and selection process. However, it is very hard to draw conclusions per faculty as alumni go to work for many different employers. Per sector, more reliable conclusions can be drawn. On the basis of by which sector UM graduates of a specific study are employed, this report could be used to draw conclusions per specific study. For example, language competences turn out to be very important in internationally oriented governmental institutions. Graduates of the European Law School are likely to work for these institutions. Therefore, it makes sense to tailor language policy for this study to this demand.

Additionally, the results show that approximately half of the employers attach value to proficiency in a third language. However, this varies also widely per sector. For example, 80% of employers in the producing & service sector attach value to proficiency in a third language. This sector may be an important employer for graduates of IB: Supply Chain Management. In this way the implications per study can be evaluated.

Next to that, many employers mentioned a specific third language they add extra value to. German and French were mentioned most often, which is reasonable, as these are probably the biggest languages in Europe. Thus, for students who want to work for an internationally oriented firm within Europe, German or French can probably be recommended over other foreign languages.

Furthermore, results show that most employers expect their employees to speak both English and Dutch. It also became clear that Dutch is often decisive in the recruitment process of employers based in the Netherlands. Moreover, the majority of the employers for who it was not decisive, still indicates that they find it a positive factor for their employees being able to speak Dutch. This has important implications for international students aspiring a career in the Netherlands, as it will be very recommendable for them to learn Dutch based on these results. Thus, it should be considered to clearly communicate this to international students once they start their

study in Maastricht, such that if they have intentions of trying to find work within the Netherlands, they can start learning Dutch already in an early stage of their studies.

A small majority of the employers indicated that they associated a high level of language competences with positive qualities, such as intelligence and versatility. This may be an extra reason to encourage students to learn an extra language, as for half of the employers consider it a positive signal. Nevertheless, it should be considered to what extent this signal is considered in the job application. However, as also a majority of the employers indicated to find language competences important, it is probable it is taken into account. Thus, studying an extra language can be valuable, even though the extra acquired language cannot be put to use in the profession.

Finally, many employers do seem to expect higher language competences of an international university like Maastricht University. This is mostly due to the English education and the contact with international students, though a small half also believes that students have enjoyed more language education. Language education is currently not mandatory at Maastricht University, so therefore this expectation is not true for most graduates. Considering this finding, it could be considered whether the university should offer a mandatory course in, for example, academic English.

15. Conclusion

In general, the employers in the sample found language competences important and they played a significant role in the recruitment process. Most employers expect competence in both Dutch and English from their employees. Others expect only Dutch or only English, and some exceptional cases, mainly internationally oriented government institutions require competence in 3 foreign languages. Dutch is often decisive. English is also decisive for approximately 40% of the employers. Most employers do not require certified proof of language competences, and many do not value such proof at all.

Approximately half of the employers do attach value to the ability to speak an extra third language, though most do not need it in their daily practice. This suggests that the competence in 3 languages is associated with certain positive qualities. There is not one clear specific language that employers value specifically, though German and French score highest.

Often there are a few specific functions for which language competences may be more important, for which language competences are taken into account more. However, employers most of the time do not differentiate across studies. There are only higher expectations of language competence in English for studies taught in English. Also, some have higher expectations for studies which are internationally oriented.

Most employers connect living abroad with a higher level of language competences. However, many indicate that the extra competence in the local language usually does not have value for them; they attach much more value to the experience the student has gained by being abroad.

A small majority of the employers indicated that they associated a high level of language competences with certain positive qualities, such as intelligence and versatility. This may be an extra reason to encourage students to learn an extra language.

Finally, this research found out that employers generally have higher expectations concerning language competences of international universities. This is mainly due to the fact that they expect education to be in English. However, almost 40% of the employers also expect that graduates of international universities have enjoyed more language education during their studies.

Hopefully, the results of this study can be used to even further improve language policy at the university.