



Annual Report International Students Advisory Board

2024

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Introduction

The debate about internationalization, in education but also in other fields, remains at the forefront in Dutch politics. The number of international students in the Netherlands is something that is looked at with great interest by different parties. The effects of, for example, the ban on recruitment in foreign education fairs seem to be showing: every year fewer international students come to the Netherlands. This ban is one tool from the Dutch government in the process of providing handholds to control international student numbers. The bill *Internationalisering in Balans* sets out further measurements. Such as the promotion of Dutch in the classrooms.

There are many positions in the debate about internationalization, with a lot of variations. Overall, there seem to be two sides. On the one hand there is the side that views internationalization as negative: it costs money, it leads to overfull classrooms, and it leads to a heated housing market. They see the declining numbers as a success. On the other hand, there is the side that views internationalization as positive: it brings much needed international talent to the classrooms and to the workforce. They worry tremendously about the negative effects on the limitation and fear international damage to the reputation of the Netherlands. And between these sides, with all its variations, stands the international student. The one talked about, but in a lot of cases, not talked with. What the debate and the policy does to them, as humans, as peers, as young people leaving their home and their country to come to the Netherlands, seems to be forgotten.

Luckily, representation of international students is something that gets more attention. The National Commission, for instance, is grateful to have the international Students Advisory Board. A soundboard to test their ideas and a way to receive new insights about what is important to international students. A way to talk with the people we're all talking about.

In this annual report the Students Advisory Board reports about its activities of the year 2024 and takes a look at the goals for 2025.



International Students Advisory Board

The Students Advisory Board (SAB) started in September 2022 as a result of the evaluation of the Code of Conduct. In 2022 it started with its first seven members and the first task was to find out what could work for the SAB in terms of structures and arrangements. It had to find out what could be constructive ways to advise the National Commission (NC) about the international students' perspective on Code of Conduct (CoC) – related matters. It laid the groundworks for the board to function on. In the summer of 2023 the SAB welcomed three new members and the SAB continued its task. Items that were discussed were, amongst other things, the bill *Internationalisering in Balans* and the larger discussion about internationalization, a protocol in case of unsafety of international students, social security and its impact on Dutch educational systems, the language policy amongst councils at Dutch institutions and career opportunities for international students. In 2024 the SAB had to say goodbye to most of its 'founding members'. Seven members left, due to finishing their studies or other reasons, and three members stayed on. Luckily the SAB welcomed four new enthusiastic members to complete the board.

Below you can read about the activities of the SAB in 2024. Although this annual report covers the whole of 2024, for the SAB the year essentially consists out of two parts: from January until June, in which the composition of members remains unchanged, and from September until December, in which the composition of the members is mixed up due to members leaving and coming into the SAB in the summer. For this reason, the annual report also follows this partition.

International students advisory board: from January until June 2024

In the first part of the year the SAB met once online and was to suppose to meet each other twice in person. Unfortunately, the second physical meeting – which was supposed to be with the complete NC – fell through due to problems on the train tracks. The members just couldn't reach the venue. This was particularly unfortunate because it was the moment for the NC to thank the leaving members for their work in the SAB and it was a great opportunity for the members of the board and the commission to meet each other.

However, in the meetings that did not fall through, important topics were discussed. One of them is the progress the SAB made in pursuing its role in advising the NC about CoC-related matters. The board found itself struggling to find a constructive way to make the CoC more known amongst international students and to bring forth topics that are interesting to the NC. Because this is the core of the purpose of the SAB, it was decided to share these concerns with the NC. The chair of the NC, Paul Rullmann, provided a listening ear and reassured the SAB that it was free to pursue its goal as the board sees fit. This discussion was taken further into the second part of the year.

Other topics that were discussed in the first part of the year were the current state of affairs. What are international students struggling with and thriving at? One of the issues was that learning Dutch may not yet be facilitated for every international student. Without being able to easily learn the language, it becomes more difficult to integrate, and it makes searching for a job in the Netherlands more challenging. Besides the language gap, it is noted that in any case finding a job in the Netherlands as a (graduated) international student is challenging. Another struggle remains housing, although it seems to be less worrisome than a couple of years ago. Luckily, not everything is challenging. For EU-students, the reform in study finance is helping tremendously. These students can focus more on their actual studies rather than having to focus on paying for it.

In 2024 the SAB itself played an active role in the recruitment of new members. New members are appointed by the NC in consultation with the SAB. In the previous recruitment round, the current SAB was informed but not actively involved in the process. This year, current members sat with the interviews with prospective members. This provided the bureau of the NC, which coordinates the recruitment, and prospective members a better view of what it means to be a member of the SAB. This new manner of recruitment will be continued in 2025.

As noted before, the meeting between the NC and SAB in the summer of '24 fell through. The prepared and planned discussion could not take place. However, it marked an ending for some of the members: Aysun Hasan (PR), Mitchell Muchuchuti (chair), Liliana Almeida (vice-chair), Patryk Jarmakowicz, Sumneet Kaur, Miklós Papp en Fernando Teruel left the SAB. Sarah Parker, Ato Essuman Mensah and Rauf Mahmud Zada stayed on. And it was decided to welcome Arvin Gharib,

Marjorie Miranda, Isaq Tuna and Parker Winkel starting from September. Below you will find a schematic overview of the composition of the SAB per December 31, 2024.

International students advisory board: from September until December 2024

In the second part of the year, the board met thrice: twice online and once in person. Starting from September, the board faced a new composition. The question remained, however, what the best way forward with the SAB was. No easy question for members who just joined the board. Nevertheless, many great ideas were discussed. It was reaffirmed that the SAB’s main task was to inform the NC about the international students’ perspective on CoC-related matters. Although it may be a nuance, seeing the board more as a panel which is solely focused on that task, may just lead to greater achievement on that task. It means releasing the board of all kinds of practical matters and facilitating the board on its primary role. This idea is worth pursuing and was the main focus for the remainder of 2024 and will remain the focus for 2025.

In December there was a shared, physical, meeting between members of the NC and the SAB. The focus of this meeting was to exchange views on different topics. This led to great discussions about internationalization and the current political discourse around it, the housing market and discrimination towards international students on it, and the provision of information to international students with special needs. This last topic was also covered by Marjorie Miranda in NC’s December newsletter. Parker Winkel shared his personal motivation to join the SAB in the same newsletter.

The topic of the provision of information for international students with special needs is a topic the SAB will continue to pursue in 2025.

Schematic overview of the composition of the international students advisory board per December 31, 2024

<i>NAME</i>	<i>INSTITUTION</i>	<i>UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION</i>
<i>Ato Essuman Mensah</i>	HAN University of Applied Sciences	<i>Vereniging Hogescholen</i>
<i>Rauf Mahmud-Zada</i>	HAN University of Applied Sciences	<i>Vereniging Hogescholen</i>
<i>Isaq Tuna</i>	IHE Delft Institute of Water Education	None
<i>Parker Winkel</i>	Radboud University	<i>UNL</i>
<i>Sarah Kuipers</i>	The Hague University of Applied Sciences	<i>Vereniging Hogescholen</i>
<i>Marjorie Miranda</i>	The Hague University of Applied Sciences	<i>Vereniging Hogescholen</i>
<i>Arvin Gharib</i>	Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences	<i>NRTO</i>

Preview into 2025

As noted above, there are some initiatives from 2024 that will be continued in 2025. Mentioned were the active role of the SAB into the recruitment of new members, pursuing its goal of informing and advising the NC about the international students' perspective on CoC-related matters and specifically the topic of the provision of information for international students with special needs.

Another issue the SAB would like to address is to make the existence of the CoC more aware under the international student population. The board wants students to know where they can go if problems arise. Different initiatives will be taken up in '25 to address this issue. Other topics to discuss the coming year are related, amongst others, to doing a board year as an international student and to students coming from war-torn countries.

The SAB looks forward to meet the NC in person at least two times in 2025 and to have meaningful online or in person discussions.



Colophon

National Commission Code of Conduct of Higher Education

E-mail:
info@internationalstudy.nl

This annual report can be downloaded on www.internationalstudy.nl