

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD

## Annual Report 2023

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## 1.0 Response on the bill: “Internationalisering in balans”

The Student Advisory Board is a council with students representing multiple universities. Currently, there are ten members. Of those ten members, three positions were filled, that being the Chairman, Vice-chair and secretary, and lastly Public Relations officer. The board is underneath the National Commission. Therefore, as a board, we collectively would like to express our opinion on this bill. Although we see a positive outcome regarding implementing the Dutch language amongst international students. We are aware of the benefits such as entering the Dutch labour market at ease, integrating into society, adapting to the culture quicker, and understanding Dutch peers more easily and more. There are more challenges and therefore, instead of a balance of things, there will be an imbalance, which raises more questions than solutions. Therefore, below we would like to highlight these challenges that may arise:

### **Discrimination**

- Even though international students might be able to learn Dutch, they will still struggle to find a job when companies start putting vacancy titles such as “native Dutch speakers only”.

### **Labour Market**

- As stated in the document – the extent depends on the labour market – Will that mean that different levels of Dutch would be required in each region? How again will that determination be? (issue with the rising of the English labour market, discrimination, and different levels of education will result in an imbalance of education received).

### **Educational Institutions**

- To expect every international student to learn the Dutch language: some students decide to stay in the Netherlands and learn the language to earn their living here; however, others want to return to their countries and continue with their lives there. For the second type of students, learning Dutch is seen as an ‘additional study load’ that will not bring any benefits because they have no intentions to use the language in the future.
- A quick comparison of citations on Dutch and English written papers makes this self-evident. By pushing globally relevant studies to be taught in Dutch, they harm students’ possibility of joining the global discussion on those studies by reducing their familiarity with English writing and publishing skills.
- It is not realistic to expect them to fully master a language in 3-4 years while also doing a full-time degree.
- A better solution might be to allow international students to learn Dutch for free if wanted. Learning Dutch still has to be paid for in most universities, and this is one thing that stops intrinsically motivated students from learning it. Instead of making it mandatory to learn it, it would be much more motivating to allow the students to learn it.

- While we understand the need to address capacity and quality of education, the introduction of access restrictions might affect 'the classroom balance and the diverse student body' that is promoted by so many universities (many international students are attracted by that).
- The current advantages of Dutch higher education and its accessibility attract a huge number of international students. With the changes to be implemented, this will have a significant impact on the prospective internationals who might not want to study in the Netherlands anymore. Changes in the language requirement and access restrictions might influence the attractiveness of Dutch educational institutions. This also must be well-thought-out before implementation.

Overall, the proposal will affect mostly non-EU students, therefore the impact on the housing and work overload will be minimal, as these are systematic problems. And this seems more of a chauvinistic measure than an intelligent solution. On the other hand, the fact that the open consultation is only available in Dutch, even though logical, shows the lack of willingness to receive feedback from those whom this initiative will affect the most. Therefore, we strongly suggest that this bill be delayed and in that time frame, international students should be reached out more to share their opinions, experiences, feelings, and ideas or solutions.

## **2.0 Input to the NC on the importance of protocol in case of unsafety of international students**

Globally, the rules and regulations of higher education are for the betterment of economies and social uplift. As the global landscape of education evolves, colleges become more diverse, accepting students from all over the world. In this setting, the establishment of procedures for international pupils is critical. These rules serve as guiding principles for the effective integration, support, and success of international students in the university setting. This essay investigates the significance of such regulations and their impact on creating a loving and inclusive academic environment.

One of the most important reasons why procedures for international students are necessary is to promote cultural awareness and understanding. International students have various backgrounds, habits, and beliefs. Universities can foster a culture of diversity by developing policies that enhance cultural understanding. Navigating the academic landscape in a foreign country can be difficult for international students. Thus, methods that offer full academic support and supervision are critical. This could include customized advising services geared to the specific needs of overseas students, help with course selection and access to tutoring or mentorship programs. Adhering to protocol is not only important for the well-being of international students but also for legal compliance and safeguarding their rights. Universities must ensure that their protocols align with relevant laws.

To summarize, the procedure for international students is critical for colleges trying to foster an inclusive, supportive, and successful academic community. Universities can improve international students' educational experiences and achievements by focusing on cultural sensitivity, academic support, community integration, and legal compliance.

### **3.0 The three topics to exchange views on during the speed dates NC and SAB**

In June 2023, the National Commission (NC) and the Student Advisory Board (SAB) had a collaborative session where a “speed dating” initiative took place. During the speed dating session, members of the NC and the SAB had the opportunity to establish a short discussion with each other on different topics within a designated time frame that, once finished, would allow rotating conversation partners, and continue the discussion. Three rotations took place over three different topics which were:

- Internationalisation and the Current Political discussion around it
- Social Security and its Impact on the Dutch Educational Systems
- Language amongst councils in Dutch institutions and Career Opportunities for International Students (Non-EU)

These topics proved to be of great relevance for both sides and enabled energetic conversations between them. The opportunity to exchange perspectives and listen to a different point of view broadened the understanding and view of both the National Commission and the Student Advisory Board on these latent topics for all students in the Netherlands.

Simultaneously, “speed dating” proved to be a fun and engaging way to meet each other and build connections between both boards’ members. The SAB considers this activity should be practised and promoted throughout the joint meetings since it not only enhances better understanding but makes the NC and SAB stronger together.

## 4.0 Internationalisation and the Current Political discussion around it

Recently, the topic of internationalization has gained significant attention in the Netherlands, especially within the context of students in higher education. Political discussions and debates surrounding internationalization have been centered around several key issues that directly impact international students. As SAB, representatives of the international student community, it is essential for us to engage constructively in these discussions and ensure that the voices of international students are heard. In the next section, let's delve into the specific implications of these political discussions and potential changes for international students in the Netherlands.

Dutch universities are immediately implementing measures to manage the influx of international students and to enhance Dutch language proficiency. They aim to reduce the intake of international students, decrease the proportion of English-taught bachelor's programs, offer more Dutch-taught programs, and promote Dutch language proficiency among teachers and students. While there are no implications for current international students, there will be for future ones. These measures may limit the options available to prospective international students and potentially create additional barriers to their entry into Dutch universities.

As representatives of the student body, our viewpoint on these measures is that while we understand their need to address these challenges, certain aspects warrant further consideration. We encourage universities to ensure that these measures do not unintentionally limit opportunities or compromise diversity. The decision to reduce recruitment efforts at international fairs raises concerns about potential impacts on attracting talented and diverse individuals. While promoting Dutch language proficiency among students and faculty is commendable, providing support for language learning for all students remains crucial. Lastly, the limitation of new English-taught bachelor's programs should be carefully weighed against ensuring opportunities for both Dutch and international students are preserved.

In conclusion, while supporting efforts addressing challenges associated with Internationalization, considerations must be made regarding inclusivity and diversity, taking into account also the international students' perspectives.

## 5.0 Social Security and its impact on the Dutch Educational Systems

During the Summer meeting of the National Commission and Student Advisory Board we had on our agenda such topics as: *“Sociale veiligheid en de invloed ervan op het Nederlandse onderwijssysteem”*. One of the Student Advisory Board members presented the material regarding the topic *“Social Security and its influence on the Dutch education system”*.

The goal of the presentation was to depict the current situation with social security, sustainability, and public safety, which in general create significant influence on the national quality of the educational system. Some facts and figures were presented during the session as well.

Another part of the presentation was advice and recommendations for the issues that the Dutch educational system may encounter.

One of the issues was regarding Sustainable development goals and the approach that must be taken toward some of the SDGs as they have a direct impact on the quality and structure of national education.

Another point that was proposed during the session was about Artificial Intelligence and the disconnection of responsibility and power. The conclusion represented that actions must be taken over the current trends. Such advice as Further development and promotion of sustainable development goals(SDGs), More actions towards Social Security, and comprehensive policies for Artificial Intelligence were proposed to establish a shield in case of issues that decrease the quality and efficiency of the national educational system.

## 6.0 Language amongst Councils in Dutch Institutions

The use of the Dutch language among councils with Dutch and international members in Dutch institutions, particularly universities, presents both advantages and disadvantages, along with implications for international students in their careers.

### Advantages

- **Integration and Inclusivity**

Utilizing the Dutch language fosters a sense of integration and inclusivity among members of the council. It facilitates effective communication and collaboration, enabling all members to participate fully in discussions and decision-making processes.

- **Cultural Understanding**

For international members, learning and engaging in the Dutch language deepen their understanding of Dutch culture and society. It promotes cultural immersion and facilitates meaningful interactions with Dutch colleagues and students.

- **Local Engagement**

Using Dutch encourages international members to engage more deeply with the local community and society. It enhances their ability to connect with Dutch students, faculty, and staff, fostering stronger interpersonal relationships.

- **Career Opportunities**

Proficiency in the Dutch language opens doors to a broader range of career opportunities, especially within the Netherlands. International students who can communicate effectively in Dutch may have a competitive edge in the local job market.

- **Academic Advancement**

Accessing academic resources and materials available in Dutch enhances international students' academic advancement. It allows them to engage more deeply with Dutch literature, research, and educational content, enriching their learning experience.

### Disadvantages

- **Language Barrier**

For international members who are not fluent in Dutch, language barriers may hinder their active participation and understanding during council meetings. It can lead to feelings of exclusion and frustration, limiting their ability to contribute effectively.

- **Limited Accessibility**



The use of Dutch as the primary language may limit the accessibility of information and resources to international members who are not proficient in Dutch. It creates challenges in accessing important documents, policies, and announcements.

- **Cultural Disconnect**

International members may experience a cultural disconnect when discussions and decisions are predominantly conducted in Dutch. It may inhibit their ability to fully grasp nuances in communication and decision-making processes, leading to misunderstandings.

- **Professional Development**

International students may face challenges in their professional development if they lack proficiency in Dutch. Certain career paths within the Netherlands may require fluency in Dutch, limiting opportunities for international students in those sectors.

- **Inequality in Access**

The use of the Dutch language may perpetuate inequality in access to opportunities and resources among international students. Those who are proficient in Dutch may have advantages over their peers who are not, creating disparities in academic and career advancement.

While the use of the Dutch language promotes integration, cultural understanding, and career opportunities, it also poses challenges related to language barriers, accessibility, and cultural disconnect for international members and students. Balancing linguistic inclusivity with the need for effective communication and collaboration remains essential in creating a supportive and equitable environment within Dutch institutions. Providing language support and promoting multilingualism can mitigate some of the disadvantages, fostering a more inclusive and diverse community.

## 7.0 Career Opportunities for International Students (Non-EU)

During the past year, the SAB board, we, have addressed topics such as internships and career opportunities for internationals (non-EU) after the completion of their studies. This topic is still a concern of many international students as they continue to find sentences such as “You need to have an EU passport or permit for this role” or “Only apply if you have a work permit in the Netherlands”. Many find these words discouraging as they only are given a year to find a permanent job upon the completion of their studies.

The issue lies with the workplaces/companies that state that “they do not have the funds to sponsor non-EU employers”. Unfortunately, the job market has a preference for people who already have some work experience, but how does one acquire work experience if even finding an internship is hard? This and many other questions have been recurrent on the discussion table of SAB meetings.

We have not found one perfect solution but we have brainstormed a few ideas that might help international Non-EU students. For instance, call for the educational institutions that hosted these students for 3-4 years, to have more responsibility in helping them find a place in the job market; include courses or workshops that better prepare students to build better CVs, and motivation letters; organize more networking events every end of the school year etc.

All in all, SAB is of course, always open to help throughout the years any international student that reaches out because many times the answer or opportunity can be found within our community.