



## **Annual International Student Survey 2019**

7th June 2019

Erasmus Student Netwerk | Landelijke Studenten Vakbond | Interstedelijk Studenten Organisatie

## Background

The 'Annual International Student Survey' (AISS) is a shared project between the Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (ISO), de Landelijke Studenten Vakbond (LSVb) en Erasmus Student Network the Netherlands (ESN). Over the past few years the amount of international students studying in the Netherlands, part-time or full-time, has greatly increased. Through which more discussion about internationalisation of the Dutch higher education and the position of international students in the Netherlands has taken place. ISO, LSVb and ESN collectively have a need to gain more insight into the position of the international students in the Netherlands to see where there might be room for improvement. In 2018 it was decided upon to make an inventory of the position of the international students in the Netherlands, resulting in the first edition of the AISS. In order to continue to properly monitor the experience of international students, it was decided upon to have this inventory return annually. Hereby the report of the second inventory.



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# Introduction

The urgency of ISO, LSVb and ESN lies around the increasing amount of international students in the Netherlands. Where in 2006 only 30.000 full-time international students were studying in the Netherlands, in 2018 the amount reached almost 90.000 . If also the amount of people that for a shorter amount, for instance an exchange, stay in the Netherlands are included, it would have been 122.000 international students in total in 2018 . With this, The Netherlands is an incredibly popular destination for international students and this is expected to increase within the coming years . Which in turn also influences the interpretation of the Dutch higher education. In the meantime, 74% of the Masters courses at universities are taught exclusively in English . Internationalization offers opportunities for the Netherlands, provided it is steered in the right direction. To ensure that it goes well, it is important to know in which areas further profit can be gained. In this context it is essential to question the international students themselves and to share their experiences. The AISS hopes to be able to contribute to this with this broad exploration. This report will therefore conclude with a number of recommendations.

## Parties involved

As mentioned earlier, ISO, LSVb and ESN Nederland are the initiators of the AISS. This means that the project is fully carried by and for students. ESN Netherlands is part of the international Erasmus Student Network and is with branches in more than 40 countries the voluntary organization for students in international higher education in Europe. ISO is the umbrella body of organizations that represent the interests of students at their university or university of applied sciences at a local level. The LSVb is a federation of local student unions and defends the interests of all students at Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities in the Netherlands. Together, the ISO and LSVb represent the general interests of nearly 750,000 students at universities and colleges. In addition, Nuffic, the Association of Dutch Cooperating Universities (VSNU) and the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) have been involved in the distribution of the AISS.

## Method

The structure of the AISS is similar to that of last year however, the questionnaire has been adjusted and improved on various points. For example, the number of questions has increased, more attention is being paid in this edition to student welfare and there is room for respondents to make recommendations to improve the position of international students. At some points it is therefore difficult to make one-to-one comparisons with last year, at other points the comparability is high. In any case, an attempt has been made to create the broadest possible picture of the position of international students. It was therefore decided to divide the questionnaire into 6 areas: education, work, social integration, information provision, housing and student welfare. Within these areas there is a balance between closed questions and open questions. During January and February, the questionnaire was spread throughout the country and responses were collected from students at various higher education institutions. An extensive data analysis took place in March, which looked at both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the obtained data. In this report the results will be discussed as trends and possible indications for points for attention in the field of internationalization.

<sup>1</sup> Nuffic (2019). 'Incoming degree student mobility in Dutch higher education 2018-2019'.

<https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/incoming-degree-student-mobility-dutch-higher-education-2018-2019/>

<sup>2</sup> Nuffic (2019). 'Incoming degree student mobility in Dutch higher education 2018-2019'.

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<sup>3</sup> Nuffic (2018) 'Incoming student mobility in Dutch higher education 2017-2018'.

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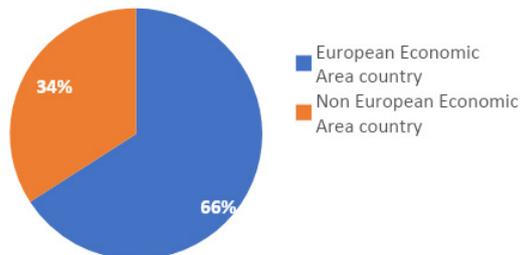
<sup>4</sup> Nuffic (2018) 'Incoming student mobility in Dutch higher education 2017-2018'.

<https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/incoming-student-mobility-dutch-higher-education-2017-2018/>

## Results

In total there are 1002 respondents, of which 660 students are of European nationality and 342 are from outside the EU. Most of the European respondents are from Germany, followed by Bulgaria and Italy. Most non-European students are from India, then from Indonesia and then from China. Of the respondents, 73.5% said they were staying in the Netherlands for a full-time study, 16.1% for an Erasmus exchange, 6.6% for a non-Erasmus exchange and 3.9% for other reasons such as an internship.

Where are you from?



### Education

For each international student it applies that he / she is in a new country, a new educational system. To what extent the student knows how to adapt to the new system differs per student. To map which general ones, a number of questions about the obstacles that arise for new students were added into the investigation. The subjects that can be distinguished herein are: language skills, quality of education, testing and information provision. Satisfaction has been mapped on each of these subjects on the basis of a five-point scale (from very dissatisfied to very satisfied). A general trend that can be established based on this data is that international students are relatively positive about the education at their institution. When the “dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied” categories are taken as the starting point for dissatisfaction, there is not a single issue with regard to education, where the dissatisfaction percentage is more than 20%. What stands out here is that 68.9% indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of teachers.

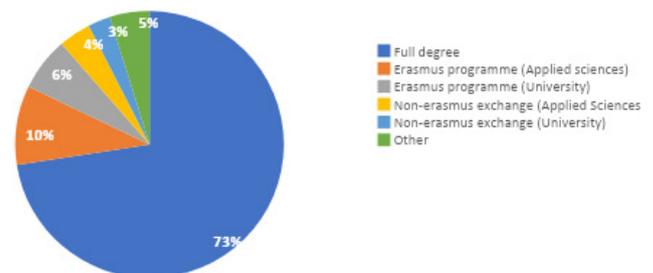
In contrast, 27.2% of the respondents state that cultural differences are small or even ignored in the classroom. Internationalization is more than just teaching in English and in this way it appears that the “International Classroom” is not yet being achieved everywhere. This is worrisome because the development of intercultural competence is crucial to internationalize in a responsible manner. One respondent describes the lack of this as follows: “The classroom is predominantly Dutch, so the opinions and feelings of international students are not taken into consideration, while also force fitting us to what Dutch students prefer and the way they behave / do things.”

Furthermore, 22.1% of the respondents indicate that they feel that their voice is heard only slightly or not at all at the university. For example, a student indicates: “There are times when the university asks for input from students, but nothing seems to change.”

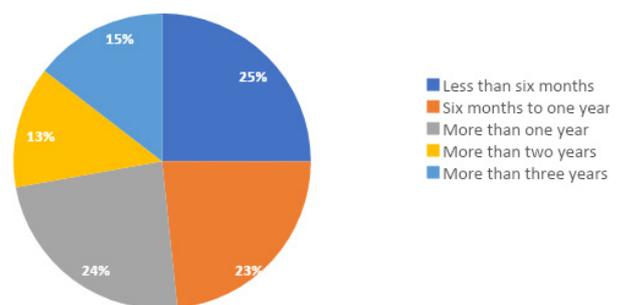
### Work

It is very common for Dutch students to take a part-time job alongside their studies. However, this is not the case for international students. Judging from the numbers on this subject, it appears that 23.7% cannot find a job and 9.1% are not aware of the fact that international students may have a side job in the Netherlands. Only 28.7% of the respondents said they had a part-time job in addition to their studies. Certainly in the context of social integration and financial resources,

What is the reason for staying in the Netherlands?



For how long have you been in the Netherlands?

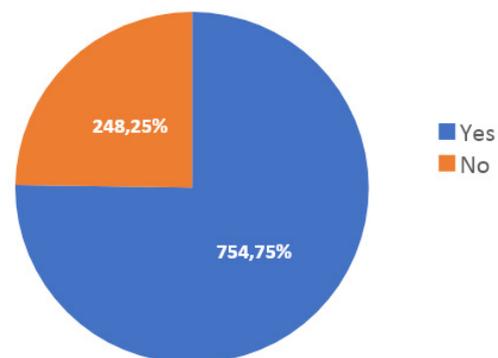


having a side job can play an important role. In addition to the fact that students who stay in the Netherlands for only a few months are less inclined to take up a part-time job, there are obstacles for international students who are looking for work. One respondent shares: “The way non-EU internationals have to apply to working permits creates an incentive not to hire them. My contract was delayed for more than a month because of how the bureaucratic system works regarding the working permit”.

## Social Integration

Good integration into Dutch society is important to improve the experience of international students, to promote cultural exchange and to increase the chances of permanent establishment. It is therefore remarkable that three-quarters of the respondents indicate that they want more interaction with Dutch students. When asked what could be done to improve integration between Dutch and international students, an international student responded: “I have met a lot of Dutch students but I find it very hard to become close to them or how to actually make friends with them. Almost my entire study is with Dutch students yet I barely speak to them.” To achieve good integration, it is crucial to have sufficient knowledge of the Dutch language. Nevertheless, 36.8% of the respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the possibilities for learning Dutch. Despite the above-mentioned shortcomings in the field of social integration, 61.8% of the international students indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their social life. A large majority are satisfied or very satisfied with the accessibility of sports clubs (63.9%) and study associations (53.7%).

Would you like more interaction with Dutch students?



## Information provision

As an international student you come into contact with numerous organizations and institutions, from the Immigration and Naturalization Service to the municipality. This is new territory for many international students, so the question is to what extent do these bodies succeed in passing on the right information to international students. The previous edition of the AISS showed that there is sometimes a lack of English information. That is why the AISS of this year specifically asked about the satisfaction of international students with the (English) provision of information from various organizations. What is striking is that many respondents indicate that they are neutral about this. People are most satisfied and very satisfied with the information provided by the banks (55.2%) and public transport (51.3%). People are most dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with DUO (29.5%) and insurance companies (26.4%).

## Housing

One of the first priorities when you are going to study abroad is to go looking for a room. 78.3% of the respondents have already taken care of a place to live before they arrive in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, that is not always easy, for example, think of advertisements that explicitly state that they do not want internationals. 36.2% of the respondents indicated that they were rejected one or more times for accommodation because they were not from the Netherlands. 35.3% experienced one or more times that international students had to pay more for accommodation than Dutch students. This situation is also clear from the answer from one of the respondents: “They can charge the high price because they know it’s harder for internationals to find a place, especially if they aren’t in the same country, and can easily prey on the desperation of this group. Most places are either solely dutch or solely international.” It is therefore no surprise that 71.8% of respondents indicate that improvements should be made in the area of housing. When asked about who should be responsible for housing international students, 57.3% said that this responsibility should lie with higher education institutions, followed by the municipality (17.5%) and the national government (12.4%).

## Student well-being

The switch to a new country can have both a positive and a negative effect on the physical and mental well-being of international students. Therefore, respondents were asked to what extent they experienced the following: stress, feeling at home, psychological problems, loneliness, friendship, physical problems, financial problems and happiness. At first glance, the well-being of international students seems to be in order, for example, a large majority of respondents indicate that they have experienced very to extremely much friendship and happiness. However, almost half of the respondents (43.8%) indicate that they experience very to extremely much stress. 40.2% also said they had experienced moderate to extreme psychological problems. That these seemingly conflicting feelings can go together is described as follows by one of the respondents: “Although I’ve made some very good friendships - the majority being other international students - the lack of information on how to deal with homesickness has definitely hindered my studies. I wish there was more information about this. Also I’ve experienced a lot of difficulty getting professional help in regards to mental health. I wish this access would be easier.”

## Conclusion and recommendations

The number of international students has increased enormously in recent years. On the one hand this is a positive development, on the other hand it also brings concerns for the position of the international student.

### Numbers

- 75,2% of the internationale studenten would like more interaction with Dutch students.
- 36.8% say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the possibilities for learning Dutch.
- 73.2% say they are satisfied or very satisfied with teachers' English proficiency.
- 68.9% say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of teachers.
- 27.2% of the respondents state that cultural differences are only slightly taken into consideration or even ignored in the classroom.
- 22.1% of the respondents indicate that they feel that their voice is heard only slightly or not at all at the university.
- 36.2% of the respondents indicated that they were rejected one or more times for accommodation because they were not from the Netherlands.
- 35.3% experienced one or more times that international students had to pay more for accommodation than Dutch students.
- 71.8% of the respondents indicated that improvements should be made in the area of housing.
- 40.2% have experienced moderate to extreme psychological problems.
- 43.8% have experienced much to extremely much stress.

### Recommendations

- Educate teachers to deal well with cultural differences and teach teachers how diversity becomes added value in the classroom
- Institutions must make it possible for international students to learn Dutch
- Let the international and Dutch students work together within the study group
- Ensure that international students can participate in all activities of the study program and study association
- Let institutions and municipalities provide international students with the right information and guidance in finding a room
- Arrange possibility of temporary accommodation for international students who initially cannot find a room
- Invest as an institution in building housing to find a sustainable solution to the lack of rooms
- Make psychological support to institutions accessible to international students
- Ensure that international students can also participate in the participation council
- Inform international students better about the possibility to have a part-time job
- Always have institutions and organizations offer important information in both Dutch and English
- Create an annual monitor from the ministry to properly chart the position of the international student