



## **Why Academia in the Netherlands Must Remain International:**

Our Position on Internationalization

## **Why Academia in the Netherlands Must Remain International: Our Position on Internationalization**

The Netherlands has long been a hub for high-quality research and education, consistently ranking among the best globally in quantity, quality and impact of research and innovation. However, the proposed legislation, Internationalization in Balance Act (Wet internationaliseren in balans, WIB), could jeopardize the quality of Dutch science and academia by restricting its internationalization. As this topic has sparked much debate, we at PNN would like to clarify our stance on internationalization in this position paper: science and academia must remain international and accessible to uphold its excellence. We will also explain why this is especially important in the Netherlands.

### **The Value of International Talent for Dutch Research and Innovation**

Dutch academia has long attracted international talents, thanks to its wide array of interdisciplinary research fields and the strong global standing of its universities. As of 2025, the Netherlands has 11 universities ranked within the top 200 of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings<sup>1</sup> making it one of the most represented countries in that tier. International PhD candidates and students have always played a crucial role in this success.

A 2024 study identified that international collaboration is a key driver of the Netherlands excellence in science and innovation, with 63% of Dutch research output involving international partnerships, boosting its scientific impact<sup>2</sup>. In 2023, data from the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) showed that 15,810 researchers from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) were working in Dutch universities and medical centers, actively contributing to the country's research sector<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, a 2022 Nuffic study found that 24% of international graduates, mainly from outside the EEA, remained in the Netherlands after their studies, with most employed in government, education, and healthcare<sup>4</sup>. By staying, working, and paying taxes, these researchers also contribute significantly to the Dutch economy.

Beyond numbers, fostering international PhD researchers and students helps support the diversity and inclusivity of the Dutch research and academic ecosystem. Science thrives when it draws on a wide range of knowledge and perspectives that reflect global populations. This diversity encourages interdisciplinary thinking and drives innovative solutions for complex

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<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/latest/world-ranking#!/length/25/locations/NLD/sort\\_by/rank/sort\\_order/asc/cols/scores](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/latest/world-ranking#!/length/25/locations/NLD/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/scores)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/the-impact-of-internationalization-on-research-performance>

<sup>3</sup> The share of foreign scientific personnel at Netherlands universities, overall and by area of origin | Rathenau Instituut

<sup>4</sup> Higher education plays a key role in attracting international knowledge workers | Nuffic

challenges. Maintaining access for international researchers is essential to sustain the evolution of science and innovation in the Netherlands, ensuring its continued global relevance and impact.

### **The WIB Act and the risks implied to Dutch Academic Excellence**

According to Minister of Education Bruins, the WIB bill seeks to reduce the number of international students while increasing the proportion that stays after graduation, favouring the “right” students with Dutch language skills<sup>5</sup>. However, this could backfire and risk the Netherlands’ position as a leader in cutting-edge research. Tightening access for international students and researchers keeps global talent away from the Netherlands and could lower academic quality by weakening global research partnerships that contribute to most of the Dutch scientific output. Furthermore, the bill could exacerbate labour-market shortages by reducing the inflow of skilled graduates<sup>6,7</sup>. This new bill is hardly surprising, as it reflects a broader trend towards tightening immigration rules in the Netherlands<sup>8</sup>. Such restrictions could further diminish the Netherlands’ appeal to international talent and risk losing their potential valuable input in Dutch academia.

### **An Added Strain on Existing Challenges for International Researchers**

The Netherlands has always been regarded as an open-minded country by international standards. However, over the past five years, the general discourse around internationalization has shifted from predominantly positive to one of rejection. International researchers, students, and immigrants in general are often blamed for societal issues like the housing crisis and universities’ workload issues. After the 2023 election victory of the far-right political party, the PVV, many fear that further changes may be forthcoming. How these changes will further impact openness and internationalization of Dutch academia remains uncertain<sup>9</sup>.

A 2023 survey<sup>10</sup> of 1,330 international students and staff, including PhD candidates at the universities of Groningen, Utrecht, Nijmegen, Delft, Wageningen, and Twente, revealed that many feel less welcome compared to when they first arrived in the Netherlands. Around half of them attributed this change to the increasingly critical political discourse around internationalization. Survey respondents also expressed that there is a general lack of awareness about the difficulties internationals face when relocating for research and studies. Many must rebuild their lives from scratch in the Netherlands, often navigating bureaucracies

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<sup>5</sup> <https://studytravel.network/magazine/news/0/30963>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.utoday.nl/news/74764/ut-programmes-fear-new-law-quality-will-come-under-heavy-pressure>

<sup>7</sup> <https://vu.nl/en/news/2025/universities-rebalance-internationalisation>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.scienceguide.nl/2025/02/omtzingt-blij-met-daling-aantal-internationale-studenten-maar-wil-nog-meer/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://dub.uu.nl/nl/achtergrond/ik-voel-me-een-tweederangsburger>

<sup>10</sup> <https://dub.uu.nl/nl/achtergrond/internationals-voelen-zich-door-politiek-debat-minder-welkom>

and cultural differences alone. Forming friendships and social support systems is not easy, as many of their Dutch colleagues tend to separate their social and professional lives<sup>11</sup>.

A recent study by the University of Twente<sup>12</sup> found that international PhD candidates in Dutch research universities face significant challenges related to inclusion and integration. These challenges include language barriers, unclear role expectations, limited social support, all of which contribute to a weakened sense of belonging. Nuffic conducted a study in 2023<sup>13</sup> which revealed that many international PhD graduates who remain in the Netherlands continue to struggle with social isolation, language difficulties, housing shortages, and in some cases, discrimination at work and in their daily lives. Such persistent challenges lead to isolation, mental health issues, and inhibit their integration in the Netherlands. The current political shift against internationalization can only make it worse.

### **PNN's position**

The debate surrounding internationals and the internationalization of research and science in the Netherlands has sparked a range of opinions and reactions. While concerns about student numbers, the housing crisis, and the preservation of the Dutch language are valid, placing the blame on internationals is both unjust and short-sighted. Much of this discourse is often dehumanizing and ignores the immense effort and passion that international researchers invest into rebuilding their lives and careers in the Netherlands. Moreover, it disregards the significant contributions that international students and PhD candidates make to the Netherlands' scientific, academic, and societal progress.

At PNN, we emphasize that international PhD candidates and students are essential in shaping Dutch science and academia. Their diverse perspectives and invaluable expertise significantly enrich our research and educational landscape. They should be recognized as assets, not threats. We firmly believe that science and education in the Netherlands must remain open, inclusive, and accessible to international talent. We will continue to use our voice and platform to speak up against restrictive measures, such as the WIB, and to protect the position of international researchers, PhD candidates, and students.

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<sup>11</sup> Ik voel me een tweederangsburger' | DUB

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383139171\\_Factors\\_that\\_play\\_a\\_role\\_in\\_international\\_PhD\\_candidates'\\_social\\_experiences\\_with\\_inclusion\\_and\\_integration\\_in\\_an\\_international\\_learning\\_environment\\_A\\_narrative\\_inquiry\\_in\\_a\\_Dutch\\_research\\_university](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383139171_Factors_that_play_a_role_in_international_PhD_candidates'_social_experiences_with_inclusion_and_integration_in_an_international_learning_environment_A_narrative_inquiry_in_a_Dutch_research_university)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/staying-after-graduation>