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Fact sheet on internationalisation

The number of international students is growing, including at the UvA. Universities are pleased with this development, having long appealed for 'internationalisation' and attracting talented international students. Recently, there has also been criticism that universities see international students as a source of revenue. Universities supposedly spend 'millions' on recruitment campaigns to attract more international students. But is this true? This fact sheet provides answers to various questions.

Why do universities want to attract international students?

One of the UvA's core tasks is to prepare students properly for their future in a complex and increasingly internationalised world. This is facilitated by having a diverse student body. We refer to this as an 'international classroom'. Dutch students become acquainted with other cultures, perspectives and world views. They improve their English, learn how to work with others and become more creative. As such, an international classroom contributes to delivering an ambitious and inspiring course of study. Our international students in turn have the opportunity to learn about Dutch values and the Dutch mindset.

But aren't too many international students coming here?

In 2018, there were 55,969 international students in the Netherlands. This is 19% of the total student population enrolled in higher education at a research university. Most of the international students come from one of our neighbouring countries, China and USA. When it comes to student intake, universities are striving for greater diversity of countries of origin to ensure even more heterogeneous groups of students in the various degree programmes. All degree programmes, including those taught in English,

decide for themselves what the optimum ratio of Dutch to foreign students is. This is one of the reasons why, in her 2018 Dies speech, the UvA's Rector Magnificus requested the introduction of legal instruments aimed at regulating these ratios, or at least to put the brakes on the number of international students being admitted. With the publication of its Language and Accessibility Bill, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science proposed the following measures to better regulate the influx of international students: the option to raise tuition fees for students who come from outside Europe, more stringent assessment of educational institutions wishing to offer English-language degree programmes and, with the Minister's permission, the introduction of a quota. This quota is mainly intended for English-language programmes for which a Dutch version exists to avoid Dutch students being disadvantaged.

According to critics, the growing numbers of international students causes problems such as jam-packed lecture rooms, displacement of Dutch students or a lack of affordable student housing. Is this true?

The growth in the number of international students is not specifically to blame for these issues. In some degree programmes, that growth is offset by declining interest among the Dutch. Nonetheless, certain popular programmes may sometimes feel crowded. That is not only unpleasant, but more importantly, it is not in the programme's own interest to expand too quickly. The UvA has been working continuously to improve our teaching and research facilities, by adding more study places and flexible lecture rooms, for instance. And wherever possible, we are creating affordable housing in our buildings, such as in the Oudemanhuispoort.

Why can't the university stop offering/adding English-language degree programmes?

For the UvA, becoming a bilingual university was a conscious decision. We offer degree programmes in Dutch and English, as well as degree programmes in which Dutch students attend lectures in English and can choose between the Dutch-language and English-language tutorials. Maintaining the right balance in the composition of an international classroom, i.e. between Dutch and international students and between the use of Dutch and English, is important. Converting a Dutch-language degree programme into an English-language degree programme does not happen automatically. There have to be good reasons for doing so. These are explained in the UvA's Strategic Framework for Internationalisation.

Why is the UvA still recruiting international students?

The UvA does not spend a lot of money or time on expensive recruitment activities – most of our international students come from countries where no recruitment activities take place. We do not attend very many education fairs abroad. This year we went to four. Each year, the UvA spends about €140,000 at central level on international marketing and information campaigns, out of a total university budget of almost €650 million. There are 1.3 FTEs available for these activities. However, the choice for an international classroom is made at the degree programme level, which means that certain degree programmes carry out their own recruitment activities abroad, targeting particular countries.

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So international students are not recruited in order to make money and compensate for declining student numbers?

The UvA strives to be an internationally prominent university. The quality of education and academic development benefit from the added value of being able to study among a diverse group of students. And in the interest of academic continuity, degree programmes need to align with research, including research conducted in English or internationally. International students do not generate more money for the UvA than Dutch students do. Earning money or generating a profit is therefore not the point. Keeping the number of students in a particular discipline stable can be one reason. The UvA's range of disciplines is much broader than that of other Dutch universities and it wishes to keep it that way.

Why doesn't the UvA end all of its recruitment campaigns? Aren't there enough international students already?

While we do not aim to grow much further, in the interest of creating an international classroom, some degree programmes will still have to increase their numbers of international students. We do want to ensure that students who wish to study at the UvA are properly informed. We therefore prepare two information leaflets in English: one for Bachelor's students and the other for Master's students. We also provide webinars and international information rounds at our open days to inform prospective students of what they can expect from the UvA.

Our marketing activities are aimed at clear and transparent study choices and information provision. We tell prospective students and study choice advisers about the various degree programmes and what they can expect from them and inform them about the registration procedures, admission requirements and tuition fees.