

On the 14th of July 2023, the proposed law 'Internationalization in Balance' or '*wetsvoorstel internationalisering in balans*' went into consultation. As the alumni association of Amsterdam University College (AUC), we appreciate the opportunity to respond to this proposal. We would like to communicate some of our insights and concerns with you, in the hopes that it will help with the process of improving the law.

The proposed law is meant to create a sustainable balance for internationalization in higher education. A number of reasons are mentioned why this is needed, among which:

1. ... *scarcity of places in schools of applied sciences and universities, which can have detrimental effects on the quality of education;*
2. ... *a higher demand for teachers with specialist knowledge;*
3. ... *increased workload for educational staff;*
4. ... *a shortage of educational facilities and student housing;"*

The law proposes various measures to control the influx of international students, such as a *numerus fixus* measure and the requirement that at least two thirds of the total number of credits for a degree or program are obtained through Dutch language course work.

If these measures are to be applied to University Colleges in the Netherlands, they would undermine the value that Liberal Arts and Sciences Education (LAS) can add to the Dutch higher education landscape. It is tremendously valuable that students from different backgrounds and with different ideas can interact with one another in a learning environment that promotes diversity and curiosity. The interaction of different scientific and cultural perspectives of students enriches both the academic as well as the social experience of students. This would not be possible if the two measures mentioned above were implemented for University Colleges. Hence, we are happy that LAS institutions like AUC is exempt from these requirements, but nevertheless want to emphasize that this exemption should be permanent and written explicitly in the new law. Furthermore, international students contribute to a rich, lively, and diverse student experience in other Dutch academic institutions. While we acknowledge that some problems, such as the housing crisis, are very real and could affect the quality of education and the quality of life of all students, the contributions that international students make should still be acknowledged. We would like to express our insights for some of the policies proposed and foreseen outcomes with examples drawn from our experience at AUC:

Regarding language requirements: At AUC, students are encouraged to take language courses to prepare themselves for the labor market; a popular one among those offered is the Dutch language. The levels offered are also extensive, from the European A1 up to B2. Alumni who have taken the Dutch classes appreciate the opportunity and become more confident in further career prospects in the Netherlands. We do not foresee any issues with making some levels of Dutch compulsory for all students, however, the extra budget required for fulfilling these language requirements should be very carefully considered, given the relatively small class size at AUC. This budgetary issue also applies to all universities, especially with language courses since they are only effective in smaller class sizes.

Regarding housing: Students are guaranteed housing for the entire duration of their study at AUC to ensure the residential college experience. AUC admission is therefore limited by housing supply and is stable over the years. Given the current housing crisis, the admission cap (“numerus fixus”) should be tied to housing capacity, especially in housing hotspots such as Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam or Groningen. Here, we advocate for some priority in housing to go to international students whose needs are inevitable.

From the proposal, it seems that overcapacity either in education or housing is not uniform across all universities. We propose that each university be examined individually to identify specific problems that apply so that solutions could be tailored. There should be no one-size-fit-all policy to shrink internationalization across all universities, such as the umbrella ban on international recruitment earlier last year.

Regarding integration into Dutch society: at AUC students are obliged to carry out either a community project or an internship in the Netherlands during their study. Successful communities and initiatives have been borne out of these projects which strengthen students’ and alumni’s sense of belonging in the Netherlands. Therefore, supporting the liberal arts education is a sustainable investment into the Dutch knowledge and labor market.

In general, the proposed targeted numerus fixus measures are nuanced enough for universities to make good use of. However, we do believe that the emphasis on proportionality and effectiveness is necessary to ensure a fair admission process for all parties including Dutch, EEA and non-EEA students. In terms of practicality, this fixus might also affect labor markets since the non-EEA are more likely to stay in the Netherlands for work than EEA, restricting their admission might lead to shortage in critical knowledge sectors.

As a diverse and internationally oriented alumni community, we express our concerns over the long-term consequences of restricting international student influx to the Netherlands. We would like to emphasize the unique international experience as a strength of liberal arts education, which has a long and strong tradition in Europe. We strongly believe that this sentiment is shared among the other university colleges and their alumni.

In conclusion, we hope to have emphasized the following three points: (1) the importance of leaving room for exemptions of LAS programmes from the law, (2) our support for the language courses, however with budgetary concerns and (3) our advocate for specific solutions in specific institutions or bachelor programmes.

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