



Annual Report International Students Advisory Board

2025

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Introduction: policy, politics and people

In 2025 internationalization remained a central and contested topic in Dutch higher education. Political measures aimed at limiting international student numbers increasingly shape the reality of studying in the Netherlands. While these developments are often discussed in terms of capacity, funding, or labor market impact, the lived experience of international students themselves easily fades into the background. The International Students Advisory Board (SAB) exists precisely at that intersection. It brings the student voice into a debate that is frequently abstract and polarized. This year, more than ever, the SAB focused on providing nuance, experience, and perspective — not as an interest group, but as students directly affected by the choices being made.

This year was all about growth, connection and content. The newly formed members of SAB worked together to build an engaged group of students who make their voices heard. The board not only gathered valuable insights, but also provided a concrete and well-received advice. In this annual report, we look back on a year in which the student perspective took center stage.

About the International Students Advisory Board

The International Student Advisory Board consists of students from different backgrounds, nationalities, and fields of study. The council advises on issues that directly affect the international student experience within the framework of the Code of Conduct International Student in Higher Education and acts as a sounding board for policy and practice. Who are the students that make this board?

From January until June the SAB consisted of Ato Essuman Mensa, Arvin Gharib, Sarah Kuipers, Marjorie Miranda, Isaq Tuna, Rauf Mahmud-Zada and Parker Winkel. The term of office is always evaluated in summer and at that point most members fulfilled their terms or graduated from their studies. It meant saying goodbye to most members, but some were able to stay on. It also meant being able to recruit new members. Joining Rauf (HAN) and Parker (Maastricht University), new members were: Anna van der Spek (University Leiden), Bianca Tudorache (The Hague UAS), Eoghan McCarty (RUG), Jess Jia (WUR), Marko Darabos (VU), Miguel Pérez Hernández (Saxion), Nikita Golovanov (NHL Stenden), Oksana Smalii (Twente University) and Reihaneh Salehi Mourkani (Saxion).

A strong and diverse board

One of the clear successes of the year was the formation of the new cohort of SAB members. Recruitment attracted a wide range of candidates from different institutions, educational tracks, and personal backgrounds. This diversity strengthened the board's discussions and ensures that advice can be informed by a broad spectrum of experiences.

Active members played an indispensable role in the recruitment process, helping to select new members and to set expectations about the role. This approach not only improved the quality of recruitment, but also reinforced continuity and shared responsibility within the board. This practice will remain the standard going forward.

Dialogues and insights that matter

The SAB's core task is to advise the National Commission on matters related to the Code of Conduct from the international student perspective. This year, the board consciously sharpened that focus. The council met several times during the year, sometimes online, sometimes in person and twice with the National Commission. In an open and constructive atmosphere, experiences were shared, bottlenecks were discussed, and ideas were explored in greater depth. An informal setting contributed to a great environment in which the students felt free to express their opinions.

One of the SAB's great strengths lies in dialogue. Meetings with the National Commission were well-prepared by the students and allowed for open exchanges of perspectives. These conversations reinforced the value of speaking *with* international students rather than *about* them. The SAB sees this dialogue not as an end in itself, but as a continuous process that improves mutual understanding and leads to better-informed decisions at the heart of the institutions. Because of their dialogue, the SAB generated a wealth of insights for the members of the National Commission throughout the year. Recurring themes included access to reliable information, inclusion in institutional processes, language as both a bridge and a barrier, and the vulnerability of certain student groups. Particularly

the care for students from conflict-affected home countries is something the SAB holds dear. It was observed some students felt that they were actively cared for, whereas other students might feel left alone. Above all, these students are affected emotionally, because they fear for their loved ones. But it also can affect them practically, because it may mean that they have trouble accessing finances. Although the specific care for these vulnerable groups is not something that is included into the CoC, the SAB emphasizes that conflict in home countries, unfortunately, seems to be occurring increasingly. Therefore the SAB wants to highlight the need for the care and support for these students. All in all, insights like these do not stand alone; they inform ongoing conversations with the National Commission and help shape future considerations.

From discussion to advice

The dialogues also resulted in a well-considered advisory contribution that was grounded in student realities while remaining constructive and forward-looking. The advice concerned the provision of information for international students with specific support needs. The board observed that while support structures may exist, they are not always visible or accessible to international students. The SAB emphasized the need to include this type of information within the regular structures of provision of information for international students as specified in the Code of Conduct.

Raising student awareness

SAB's secondary task is to raise awareness amongst international students about the existence of the Code of Conduct and the rights and obligations that stem from it. In 2025 there were various efforts to contribute to this task. However, in choosing to focus on its primary task, the SAB had little time and energy available for this second task.

Preview into 2026

With a clear role, a committed group of members, and a strong working relationship with the National Commission, the SAB looks ahead with confidence. In the coming year, the board will, amongst continue its focused advisory role to the National Commission on Code of Conduct-related matters and work to increase awareness of the Code of Conduct among international students. It will also deepen its attention to finetune provision of information for international students and work to contribute in a meaningful way to the periodic evaluation of the Code of Conduct. Lastly, the SAB will remain a platform where international student perspectives are heard, valued, and taken seriously.

Themes that will be further explored in 2026 are the current general situation of the provision of information at the institutions of higher education, the inclusion of clear information about tuition fees for non-EU students into the Code of Conduct and an exploration into complaint procedures at the institutions and the CoC itself. In a complex and often polarized debate, the SAB will continue to contribute what it does best: grounded insight from those at the heart of international higher education.

Colophon

National Commission Code of Conduct of Higher Education

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This annual report can be downloaded on www.internationalstudy.nl