

## **RYA White Paper on Internationalization: The Future of Internationalization at Radboud University. A Nuanced Perspective**

Radboud University aspires to quality. Internationalisation plays a major role in the quality of our teaching, research and service provision. [...]:

- Our research will only excel if we operate in international partnerships.
- Our teaching thrives on international exchanges of students and staff.
- The services we provide are designed to make our international staff and students feel welcome and at home in our academic community. Our international campus reinforces the community spirit and provides facilities for students and top researchers from all over the world.

(Source: [Internationalisation at Radboud University](#))

For many years, Dutch Universities have been attracting an increasing number of international students and international employees. In 2023, the Dutch House of Representatives put forward that the internationalization of Dutch Universities has gone too far, arguing that the presence of internationals contributes to the current shortage in housing and that the teaching of international programmes results in a drop in quality. As members of the Radboud Young Academy, an interfaculty think tank of young scientific staff and professionals, we want to nuance these claims, particularly in the context of Radboud University, and to put forward a few proposals for future directions.

We certainly realize that internationalization has been a mixed blessing in the Netherlands as a whole. The housing crisis is a major issue and the large number of internationals - who are affected by this crisis as well - is an important factor. Critics of internationalization are also right in drawing attention to the financial model along which universities have been managed for more than a decade, which relies on an incentive to attract and compete for as many students as possible.

That said, the benefits of an international university outweigh the disadvantages. Successful research requires international partnerships, as highlighted by the first photograph of a black hole. Teaching in an international classroom enhances students' learning experience and helps them think more clearly, more inclusively, and more empathetically because they become aware of many differences, but also many shared features of internationalized life. Moreover, the societal and environmental challenges that the Netherlands is facing cannot be addressed outside of a wider, global context.

Internationalization, then, provides invaluable assets to organizational, personal and professional development in a university context. The excellent working conditions at Dutch universities [go a long way](#) to attract international talent – however, the 30%-tax benefit meant to facilitate knowledge workers has been scaled down as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2024. Moreover, internationals face significant challenges: The already difficult process of finding housing for incoming internationals has become yet more difficult. In spite of the importance of *gezelligheid*, the fairly strict Dutch distinction between work and private life means that international staff struggle to build a social network in the Netherlands and to put down roots. On top of the 'usual' stressors associated with moving and living abroad, the discussion around internationalization in the Netherlands has led to [concerns](#) among some international staff, and to their [feeling unwelcome](#).

Although our university's international dimension is not as strong as that of institutions in the west of the Netherlands (Randstad)<sup>1</sup>, the percentage of international scientific staff has nevertheless increased in the past years, from 30% in 2019 to 37% in 2023 (and currently). We therefore feel that, in spite of the current political climate, more can and should be done to attract and retain international staff sustainably, so that our research, our teaching, and our societal impact may continue to flourish.

To that end, the Radboud Young Academy puts forward the following proposals, using already-formulated aims from our university's current [internationalization strategy for the 2018-2025 period](#) (in **bold**, below) as a departure point.

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of international scientific staff at Radboud University is second to last compared to other Dutch universities, according to a [Rathenau report](#) published in September 2023.

**1. By 2025, the university aimed to have a “more proactive international recruitment policy” and aimed to “offer high-level, efficient support for issues related to international staff.” On the whole, the university aimed to be “an attractive employer” for international staff, where “current and prospective employees (...) feel at home.”**

In terms of the [available support](#), although the RU’s investment in the Lifeport Welcome Center has an excellent potential to support international staff, the signals we have received from international colleagues indicate that they are not visible at the faculty/institute level. Even the longstanding RU(MC) [language policy](#), which subsidizes international staff in learning Dutch, is not well known enough on campus – especially not within the medical center, where support for international staff seems to be less developed than at the RU.

To work towards “fully integrating internationalization in all processes” (another RU 2025 internationalization aim), to increase awareness of existing facilities among international staff, and to obtain a better picture of their current experiences and needs, we propose to:

- a. Include questions explicitly related to international staff experiences in the regular staff survey;
- b. Leverage existing HR-information on which staff is international to enable the RU Global Staff Support team (and RUMC HR-equivalent) to effectively inform, and keep regular (e.g., monthly) contact with, the full Radboud international community.

In terms of the university’s [attractiveness as an employer for sitting international staff](#), we wish to highlight one aspect that has particularly raised concerns lately, in light of recent internationalization debates – namely, the practicalities of learning Dutch. This is a particularly important issue also given the current shortages on the Dutch labour market in many disciplines: Since it is becoming significantly difficult to find suitable candidates that can also teach in Dutch, the only alternative is to enable (new and sitting) international staff to learn Dutch quickly and easily. The existing financial support for Dutch language courses is an excellent instrument – [not offered by default in all Dutch universities](#), and therefore appreciated at the RU. However, it does not address the significant time investment necessary for learning Dutch to a sufficiently high level to contribute to teaching activities. This places additional pressure on international staff, who are generally expected to strive for the same teaching and research output as their Dutch colleagues. Although some departments have measures in place to account for this additional time investment (e.g., temporarily reducing one’s teaching workload to facilitate teaching in Dutch within 2 years), these tend to be isolated initiatives. To provide clarity on this topic, and to better align facilities and expectations regarding learning Dutch, we propose to:

- c. Make an inventory of the existing agreements at various (RU)MC groups;
- d. Develop guidelines for how to best facilitate Dutch-learning, in cases when this is necessary.

Finally, with regard to the aimed-for [proactive international recruitment policy](#), we would propose to also consider the increasingly competitive international labour market. Looking specifically at attractive facilities for early-career researchers, we would highlight that, although policies surrounding tenure are generally attractive in the Netherlands, post-doc and other temporary-fellowship conditions are less attractive in some fields (as difficulties in attracting REI-fellows have sometimes shown). We would thus propose to:

- e. Co-fund Marie Curie, EMBO, and HDSP projects, by extending these laureates’ project time by 1 year.

**2. In 2025, the university had aimed to ensure that “increasing numbers of international researchers find their way to our campus as visiting scientists”.**

As mentioned above, finding accommodation and forming a (social) network are some of the key challenges among international staff. They are also present in the case of guest researchers who visit us for longer than two weeks, who as a result experience a much less pleasant visit, and miss out on opportunities to truly extend their network. At the moment, onboarding programmes for visiting academics are not consistently organized across campus (if at all). We propose to:

- a. Make an inventory of best practices regarding facilities and programmes for visiting researchers;
- b. Develop guidelines for organizing such a process in each institute/faculty, should it not be effective to coordinate it at the level of the university/medical center.

**3. In 2025, the university had aimed for “an increasing number of Radboud PhD candidates [who] take double or joint degrees in collaboration with our international partners.”**

We wholeheartedly endorse this aim, but would flag that, 5 years hence, setting up joint doctorate agreements remains prohibitively difficult from an administrative perspective. We would strongly support the streamlining of these procedure, to better facilitate and incentivize them.