

# International students at Fontys and their local employability

This handout contains the most important conclusions from the research within the INTERLOCALITY project on international students at Fontys. You can read about the bottlenecks they experience with regard to their orientation on the local labour market (internship, side jobs) and the success factors that contribute to their studies and finding a suitable job in the region after graduation.

Although the shortage on the labour market is high, an important group with a lot of potential remains out of the picture: international students. They have difficulty finding a suitable job in the region after their studies and therefore often return to their home country or elsewhere. That is clearly a missed opportunity, according to the partners of the [INTERLOCALITY](#) consortium, and the question is how to retain this talented group for the region. Four universities of applied sciences ([UCN](#) in Denmark, [FH Münster](#) in Germany, [Arcada](#) in Finland and [Fontys](#) in the Netherlands) and an agency focused on international labour and student mobility ([SEND](#) from Italy) have joined forces for the INTERLOCALITY project to help their international engineering and business students in their orientation and landing on the regional labour market.

## INTERLOCALITY

The aim of the project is to develop various tools that could improve the preparation and entry of international students into the local labour market, including:

- an International Alumni Monitoring Tool (I AM Talent), which collects information about the career steps of international students and alumni, and their perception of the local labour market;
- activities to support international students in their first steps on the labour market during their studies (International Talent Journey);
- online training modules in the areas of guidance & counselling, intercultural sensitivity and employability to increase the knowledge of university employees, employers and regional actors.

For the development of these tools, interviews were held in the autumn of 2022 with 40 international students and alumni, 40 regional employers (SMEs), 15 policy officers from the universities of applied sciences involved, and 15 other actors involved in internationalisation on the local labour market. The purpose of these interviews was to map the needs and experiences of the various stakeholders with regard to the local employability of international students. This handout specifically discusses the conclusions relating to international students at Fontys in the Eindhoven-Venlo region.

## FACTS AND FIGURES: international students in Dutch higher education

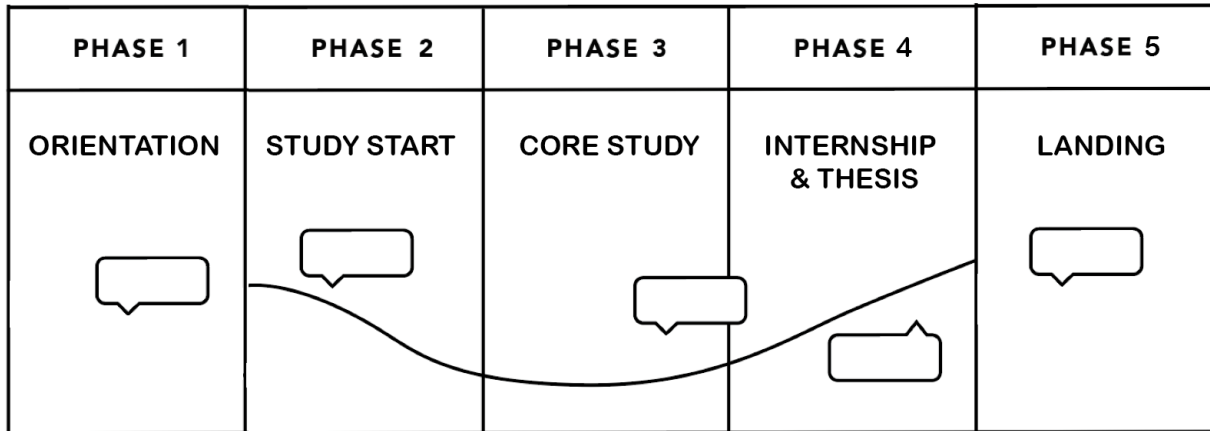
In the 2022/2023 academic year, 122,287 international diploma students studied at universities in the Netherlands. This was 15 percent of the total student population. Of all students at universities (WO), 25.1 percent were international, compared to 7.7 percent at universities of applied sciences (HBO).

At universities of applied sciences (HBO), there were approximately 11,173 new international registrations in 2022/2023, of which 7,851 students (70.3 percent) came from the EEA and 3,322 students (29.7 percent) from outside the EEA. In total, there were 2,281 more international students at universities of applied sciences compared to the 2021/2022 academic year. The total number of international students has therefore grown by 6.6 percent. (Source: 1 cijfer HO, [Nuffic](#) analysis)

One year after graduation, 46 percent of international graduates still live in the Netherlands. After five years, the stay rate has fallen to 24 percent. Of graduates from outside the EEA, 38 percent still live in the Netherlands five years after graduation, compared to only 19 percent of European students. The average stay rate five years after graduation is slightly higher among university graduates (24 percent) than among graduates from universities of applied sciences (22 percent). (Source: CBS, [Nuffic](#) analysis)

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY

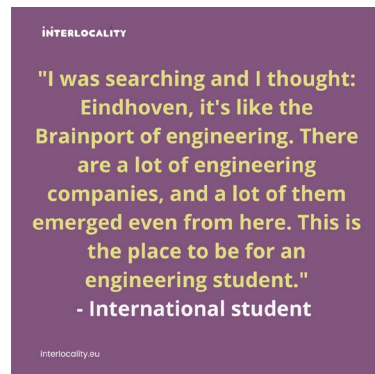
The journey of an international student while studying in the Netherlands can be divided into several phases. Each phase has its own challenges, according to the interviews.



## Phase I: Orientation

The main reasons for international students to choose the Netherlands have to do with the high quality of life and the high quality of education. They also mention the relatively low study fees compared to the US and UK, and the wide range of English-language degree programmes. Many international students choose the Netherlands after a tip from family or friends.

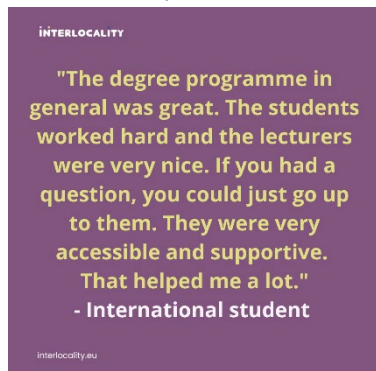
Engineering students choose the Netherlands because of the good reputation of our tech sector. Many German International Business students choose the Netherlands, and specifically Fontys in Venlo, because of its proximity. They also like that there is a large German community.



When international students mention the most important considerations for a specific bachelor's degree at Fontys, it appears that the practice-oriented nature of the programme (compared to university studies) and the fact that the institution is located in a large city (with lively student life and more facilities) are the most important factors that determine their choice. Fontys is also actively promoted in some countries.

## Phase II: Start of studies

For many international students, the start of their studies is difficult. They have a lot to deal with, especially when it comes to paperwork and other administrative matters. Some international students experience culture shock and loneliness; for the first time they are in a different culture and far away from family and friends for a long period of time. Many also have to get used to the education system at Fontys and the informal way of communicating with teachers.



International students receive help from Fontys in this first period. Students indicate that they like that Fontys helps them to find a room and to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles. They are pleased with the International Office. They also find the introduction week very valuable. It offers them the opportunity not only get acquainted with the degree programme, but also with other international and Dutch students. During their studies, international students really appreciate the accessibility and helpfulness of their teachers.

### Phase III: Later on during their studies

After their first year, international students are more familiar with the degree programme, and the bureaucratic obstacles have been overcome. They are now experiencing difficulties because they do not (yet) have a good proficiency in the Dutch language and therefore do not always integrate well into Dutch society. Some find it difficult to have to speak English all the time since it is not their native language. In addition, life in the Netherlands appears to be quite expensive and it is difficult to find suitable housing. Not everyone is able to find a much needed side job, or it proves difficult to combine study and work. International students therefore indicate that they encounter mental problems during the course of their studies.

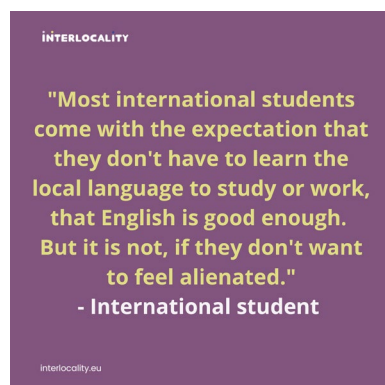
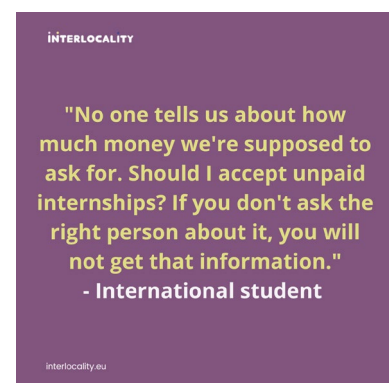


An important source of help is the social network of mainly other international students. Most international students also feel that they receive valuable support from Fontys as an institution, the teachers and their study coach. However, they would like to receive more support in some areas, such as for working with the Dutch language (Dutch language courses), for their psychological well-being and in terms of forming broader social networks via events with international and local students or extracurricular activities.

### Phase IV: Internship, side job, graduation project

During their studies, international students come into contact with the local labour market. This could be through a side job, for example, but also through an internship in the third year of study and the graduation project in the fourth year. The interviews show that it is difficult for many international students to find an internship or side job. The search is mainly complicated by not mastering the Dutch language. Also, not all students have the skills to prepare a CV or motivation letter as expected, or to present themselves well during a job interview. Cultural differences play an important role here. Local employers are also not always open to international students. Prejudices appear to be persistent. Students from outside the EEA face an additional barrier: they may only work with a work permit from the UWV (Dutch Employee Insurance Agency).

Most international students eventually find a side job or internship through a teacher or someone else close to them. They are also sometimes offered an internship via their side job or a side job via an internship. The network appears to have a major influence on finding work. And as an international student you have a smaller network than a Dutch student. International students would therefore like to receive more guidance from Fontys in coming into contact with the professional field (networking). They also want more information about the rights and obligations of employers and employees in the Netherlands and support for interpreting Dutch contracts.



Once international students start working, they increase their self-confidence. They get to know the Dutch language and culture better and gain insight into the local labour market. This helps them with the orientation for the period after graduation. Yet some encounter problems. The informal way of communicating at work appears to take some getting used to. Many also mention not mastering Dutch as a reason for social exclusion at work. They do not always feel like they belong. Many international students therefore prefer a company with many other international employees..

## Phase V: Landing on the labour market

The interviews show that most international students decide that they want to stay in the Netherlands after graduating because of a positive internship experience. Some people like the Dutch work culture or appreciate the employment conditions, others (including many engineering students) have already been offered a job by their internship company. A smaller group of students had already decided before coming to the Netherlands to study that they wanted to stay because of the favourable labour market conditions.

Another important reason to stay in the region is a follow-up study (master's degree programme). Some international students also think it would be a shame to give up everything they have built up. During their studies, they invested in building a social network and took Dutch language courses. In addition, there are students who have found their partner here. They do not want to just leave all that.

A part of Fontys' international students leave the Eindhoven or Venlo region for the Randstad, because they believe there are more opportunities for them there. They also appreciate the international community in the major cities in the west of the country. Yet the majority of international students leave the Netherlands within five years after graduating. Some are homesick for family and friends, or came to the Netherlands only for their studies. Others experience difficulty integrating into the labour market, have difficulty learning the Dutch language or cannot find adequate housing.

For a better transition from study to work, international students and alumni indicate that Fontys should play a role as a direct liaison between them and local employers. They would like to see their teachers or study coaches personally forward vacancies and put in a good word for them to potential employers. They also see benefit in an alumni network, so that they can come into contact with Fontys alumni who work at organisations with vacancies. They are already very pleased with the guest lectures and the projects with employers during their studies, just like the Fontys Career Event.

Regarding employers, the international students feel like they should allow English at the workplace and be more open to people with a different cultural background, even if this means more paperwork in the HR process for people from outside the EER. They would like it if employers draw up the employment contract and other important documents in English, spend enough time on their onboarding, and fund Dutch language lessons. They also find it important that the organisational culture is inclusive, so that they feel at home among their colleagues. Training in the field of intercultural awareness or diversity and inclusion could be helpful for this. Students also like it when employers participate in Fontys career events or graduation projects, so that they can get to know each other in an accessible way.



### Recommendations

- Make Dutch language courses part of the curriculum of English-language degree programmes;
- Facilitate exchange between Dutch and international students;
- Provide more visibility within the courses of the various services that Fontys already offers students (such as International Office, Career Center, student psychologists, student counsellors, etc.) and introduce the international students to existing third-party services.

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