

# FORUM

MEMBER  
MAGAZINE

*Discussing international education*



## THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VOICE

06 A FALSE DICHOTOMY: CROSSING THE DOMESTIC—INTERNATIONAL DIVIDE

12 STUDENT VOICES IN AGREEMENT

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26 BEWARE, THEY ARE EDUCATED!

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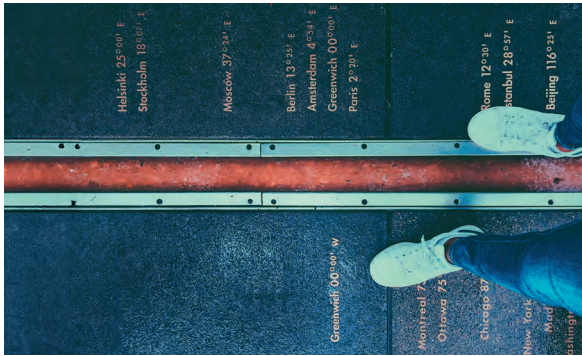
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# EDITORIAL

When we talk of the student voice, we necessarily reference both the act of speaking and listening, and this Spring 2024 edition of *Forum* seeks to unpack the different ways in which international student voices are expressed and heard in higher education.

Conscious that students today are demanding more agency from the institutions where they study, we were keen to use this edition to explore the formal involvement of international students in the lives of their institutions, be that through direct participation in governance bodies or indeed through protest and activism. We also wanted to learn more about who listens to the international student voice and how. Pursuing an international education is generally intended to support students to think critically and engage meaningfully with global society, so is anybody listening?

I am delighted that we have been able to directly include a number of international student voices in this edition, bringing first-hand accounts of the lived experience of international students in Ireland, Norway and the Netherlands.

Similarly our interviewee – Juan Rayón González – brings unique student and staff perspectives, as a former Erasmus exchange student in Istanbul, as immediate past president of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), and now as strategic manager of the INGENIUM

European Universities alliance (with ten members in ten European countries). In this interview, Juan reflects on the importance of international students developing both a sense of belonging and agency, or in other words, finding their voice and then learning to using it.

In addition to student perspectives, it is important to note that this topic is of key interest to the international education research community, and I'm pleased that we've been able to include articles from both an established and a next-generation researcher.

Dr Jenna Mittelmeier (University of Manchester, UK) encourages us to recognise the nuance and plurality in international students' voices and representations, drawing on a recent publication to outline a series of problematic assumptions in how international students are talked about.

Similarly, Emerita Prof Elspeth Jones (Leeds Beckett University, UK) – who has had long involvement with the EAIE and won the EAIE's Tony Adams Award for Excellence in Research in 2014 – queries the false dichotomy between domestic and international students. How can we understand the international student voice, if we continue to oversimplify the diverse backgrounds and requirements of the student population as a whole?

While questions remain as to how institutions formally incorporate in-



ternational students into their governance frameworks, and whether this representation is framed as part of – or separate to – the broader representation of all students, I hope that this edition of *Forum* provides new insights into this key issue. With thanks to the authors and to Lucia Brajkovic on the EAIE Publications Committee who joined me in reviewing submissions.

I hope that you enjoy reading this edition of *Forum*.

— DOUGLAS PROCTOR, EDITOR  
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# CONTRIBUTORS

## *Elsbeth Jones*

**Emerita Professor, Internationalisation of Higher Education, Leeds Beckett University**  
Elsbeth is Series Editor of Internationalization in Higher Education (Routledge) and has over 30 years of experience working with international students. She has studied in the UK and Germany, and loves travel and meeting people from other countries.

## *Simran Khatri*

**International Students' Campaigns Coordinator, University College Dublin Students' Union**

In addition to being a fulltime biomedical science student, Simran works to make international students' lives easier at her university. She completed her higher secondary school education in India, and loves to read and write poetry in her free time.

## *Vince Pados*

**Student international sports management, The Hague University of Applied Sciences**

Having grown up attending an international school, Vince has always been immersed in international education. He is passionate about sports and physical education, and the ways in which academics and athletic skills can strengthen each other.

## *Marijn Johannes Leo Rijk*

**Student international public management and leadership, The Hague University of Applied Sciences**

Marijn has studied with students from all around the world, both in his English-taught programme in the Netherlands and during his Erasmus exchange semester in Cyprus.

## *Simone Hackett*

**Senior Lecturer & Researcher, The Hague University of Applied Sciences**

Irish by origin, Simone has lived in the Netherlands for the last 17 years. She has two little girls that keep her busy, and enjoys running, traveling, comedy and getting into interesting debates.

## *Jeanine Gregersen-Hermans*

**Principal Researcher and Business Coach, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences**

Jeanine is passionate about 'marrying' internationalisation of higher education and education for sustainable development, as well as supporting students to navigate the complexities of our global society.

## *Patricia Céspedes-Sánchez*

**Chief International Officer, REIMAGINE Global Education**

Patricia has had the privilege of enhancing the global reach and engagement of both Peruvian and international institutions for over 20 years. Being a mother is the most significant role she has ever had, and each day renews her trust in a brighter future.

## *Sandra Guarín Tarquino*

**Director of International Relations, Antonio Nariño University**

Sandra is an expert in connecting people, ideas, and opportunities through partnerships, projects, networks and 'glocal engagement'. She has one daughter and seven siblings.

## *Sandra Rincón*

**Author, Researcher and Trainer on Global Engagement**

An immigrant since the age of 10, Sandra has studied in Colombia, the USA and the Netherlands. Outside of work she enjoys hiking, biking and reading.

## *Selma Bratberg*

**President, Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund**

Selma has been active in Norwegian student movements for several years. She has taken long field trips to Guatemala and Namibia, and outside of work she likes to knit and sew.

## *Aliaksandra Haurusik*

**Master's student public administration, University of Bergen**

Aliaksandra is a Belarusian activist in exile, trying to keep the language and culture of her homeland alive as much as she can. Her passion is to explore the colours of the world, to learn and to try new things.

## *Jenna Mittelmeier*

**Senior Lecturer in International Education, University of Manchester**

Jenna's research expertise focuses on critical considerations for the inclusion and treatment of international students. Outside of work she enjoys cooking, gardening and board games.

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# STUDENT VOICES IN AGREEMENT



As societal discussions around housing and immigration continue to heat up in the Netherlands, internationalisation has found itself caught in the crossfire. Against a backdrop of changing policies and public sentiment, Simone Hackett of The Hague University of Applied Sciences invited one domestic student and one international student to add their voices to the debate.

In the past, the Dutch government's vision on internationalisation was that all students in the Netherlands should obtain intercultural competencies.<sup>1</sup> However, with rising concerns over immigration and the number of international students enrolled at Dutch universities, the government has changed its outlook and is now aiming to restrict numbers and limit internationalisation activities in higher education. These restrictions directly affect international and Dutch students.

Last year, a public consultation was set up by the Dutch government that allowed people to openly share their opinions on the proposed restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

other students face if they are to be deprived of the opportunity to follow internationally oriented courses or interact with international students.

#### VINCE PADOS: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

Coming from Hungary and having grown up in Germany, I have always been drawn towards international environments. I decided to study in the Netherlands for several reasons. First, the programme I study – international sports management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences – with its strong international orientation and fast-track duration of three years, is one of the few English-taught

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Only 7.7% of students at universities of applied sciences such as mine were international. It would be a shame to reduce it even further

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University boards and academics responded, but there were few reactions from students. However, Vince Pados, an international student, and Marijn Rijk, a Dutch student, who are both studying in the Netherlands, were the first students to react to the consultation and oppose the restrictions.

Given this, I decided it would be valuable to invite both Vince and Marijn to contribute to this article, providing an international student voice and a home student voice. Below, both Vince and Marijn discuss the value of internationalisation and the importance of the international classroom and collaboration between Dutch and international students. They also discuss the fears and setbacks that they and

programmes of its kind in the EU. In addition, the Netherlands has an inclusive and multicultural reputation and The Hague, known as the city of peace and justice and for its international character, appealed to me greatly.

Recently, there have been claims that Dutch taxpayers' money is being used to fund international students' education, and that international students are taking advantage of the Dutch education system. I find these claims surprising for several reasons.

First of all, 25.1% of the total student population registered at Dutch research universities in 2022–2023 was international; however, this figure was only 7.7% at universities of applied sciences such

as mine.<sup>3</sup> This is not a big percentage and it would be a shame to reduce it even further. In Germany, there are a lot more international students and they are seen as an asset to society. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has recommended that the German government put a plan in place to double the retention of international students by 2030.

Second, according to recent research, international students generate around €1.5 billion for the Dutch economy each year.<sup>4</sup> This significant contribution is not just because of the quintupled tuition fees that non-EU students pay but also because many international students live, work and pay taxes here. I am lucky enough to work as a basketball coach at an international school in The Hague; many international students are rejected for the jobs they want because of language or cultural barriers, therefore taking whatever jobs they can get, including low-skilled roles that Dutch people are reluctant to take on, such as restaurant kitchen jobs, cleaning jobs or food delivery. Even so, the income that is generated by international students brings economic development, increased employment and societal diversity to both sparsely and densely populated locations throughout the Netherlands. More and more international students decide to stay and work in the Netherlands, securing jobs and again showing their contribution to Dutch society by filling labour shortages and paying taxes. According to recent statistics, 32% of the international students who graduated in 2018–2019 were working in the Netherlands one year later.<sup>5</sup>

As an EU student, like a regular Dutch student, I am entitled to subsidised tuition fees. In Germany, tuition fees are minimal, approximately €600 a year, while Austrian tuition fees can be as low as €20 per semester. I still chose to study in the Netherlands, where I pay a subsidised tuition fee of approximately €2220

become more open-minded and to build up my knowledge while also learning new content, new perspectives and different approaches to solving problems.

During my studies, I have built networks and made friends with both Dutch and international students. The experience has helped me develop not only my

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## I look forward to finishing my studies in the Netherlands and building more international connections to make this country and the world a better place

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per year. This excludes housing costs, food and bills and I do not receive any additional grants. For non-EU students, the tuition fee is much higher.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Netherlands is a country that has been known globally for its inclusivity and multiculturalism. This multiculturalism provides opportunities for learning not only between international and Dutch students in higher education but also outside the classroom in everyday life. My university puts a strong emphasis on helping students develop the skills they need to become global citizens and taps into this cultural diversity by designing courses that have intercultural and international learning outcomes. I get the opportunity to take part in collaborative learning projects with Dutch and international students, in which we work with Dutch and international organisations and businesses. These opportunities have helped me to

academic skills and knowledge but also my intercultural and collaborative skills, which will enable me to find better jobs. Overall, I am extremely grateful to be able to study in the Netherlands. Without this opportunity, I would not have made the friends I have, nor would I have had the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills that will help me in my future career. I look forward to finishing my studies in the Netherlands and building more international connections to make this country and the world a better place.

### MARIJN RIJK: DUTCH STUDENT

At 18 years old, I moved from a rural area in the south of the Netherlands to the political capital of the Netherlands: The Hague. With this move, a new world opened up to me and I had the choice to study my preferred degree, a Bachelor's in international public policy and leadership, in either Dutch, my mother



tongue, or English, my second language. It was logical for me to go for English, an international working language, as I chose to study in The Hague, which is renowned as the international city of peace and justice. In addition, studying in English would broaden my horizons, help me develop my communication skills and networks and provide me with international career prospects.

I am in the third year of my programme and I am thoroughly satisfied with my choice of studies and language. Studying in a classroom with a mix of

living expenses and the difficulty of finding accommodation and jobs – I also understand some of the government's concerns. The housing crisis is a societal problem that needs urgent attention, and it has been claimed that international students take up housing opportunities and pressure the market. As a student, I am experiencing this crisis first-hand and have also had difficulty finding accommodation. However, international students did not cause the housing crisis in the Netherlands. Restricting the number of international students coming to the

internationalisation seems to move away from these values as it seeks measures to limit the flow of international students and attempts to limit English-taught education, which I personally find a shame. Without these international opportunities, I would have been deprived of the intercultural experiences I have had during my studies, which have helped me develop. Looking to the future, I see a Europe that needs more understanding, along with international solidarity to solve the problems it is facing in harmony with its citizens. It is only through internationalisation that we can hope to achieve this.

— VINCE PADOS, MARIJN RIJK

& SIMONE HACKETT

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## International students did not cause the housing crisis; restricting their number will not solve the problems we are facing

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students from the EU and beyond has been such an enriching experience. It has expanded my horizons to Bangladesh, Brazil and the United States, providing me with different perspectives and approaches, and it has pushed me to think critically about societal and global issues and developments.

However, when the Dutch government last year proposed restrictions on internationalisation, it raised a lot of questions within me. International students have been the focus of many heated discussions around some of the problems the Netherlands is facing, such as the housing crisis. Although I personally see the struggle that international students experience – high tuition fees,

Netherlands and taking away an international student's opportunity to study here, with the goal of increasing the quality of a Dutch student's experience, will not solve the problems we are facing.

Internationalisation brings fundamental value to the world. The opportunity for young individuals to be exposed to a foreign culture, allowing them to develop an understanding and empathy towards classmates from all around the world, is something that I believe only brings good to our world. Such values are also essential to the European spirit, with the European Union cherishing values such as equality, freedom and the right of citizens to move and reside freely within its borders. The government's proposal on

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IN CONVERSATION WITH

# JUAN RAYÓN GONZÁLEZ

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JACOB GIBBONS  
EAIE

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From his first mobility experience as a student to his current role at one of the European University alliances, Juan Rayón González has experienced many different facets of internationalisation. As a student he visited Turkey and learned first-hand about internationalisation and its potential, later serving as president of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). Now, as strategic manager of the INGENIUM alliance, he occupies an interesting vantage point from which to reflect on the recent history and near future of international higher education.

**What do you see as the key barriers to international students having a voice in their institutions?**

JRG: This question makes me reflect on what we mean by “having a voice” and how it relates to the international student experience, and I think we can break this down into two main components. The first one is belonging: to be able to have a voice, students need to feel that people care about them

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**To be able to have a voice, students need to feel that people care about them and that they are appreciated in their host institutions**

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and that they are appreciated in their host institutions. The second one is probably the most important one: agency. For students to have a voice, they need to feel that they can make an impact, that they have a role to play.

So we need to ask ourselves, how can we facilitate students developing that sense of belonging and agency? This is important because, as we work to organise any kind of international experience, removing all those potential barriers and showing

students how their universities care about them is something that can only be done effectively if we work at different levels involving all bodies with a role to play in international education. This endeavour is mainly about making sure there is a channel and that students know what that channel is, they know whom to contact, they know what they can do. It also means ensuring students feel they are capable of changing the status quo somehow. This can be about showing students how they can create a business in the country, or how they can initiate a volunteering project in the university, or how they can create a new student club, because those are also ways of having a voice.

**You have been closely involved with both the Spanish chapter of the ESN and the Europe-wide network, serving in senior leadership roles in both. Drawing from this experience, can you point to any examples of best practice in international students shaping higher education policy or practice in their institutions or more broadly?**

JRG: One great example of community engagement and active learning is in the University of Franche-Comte in Besançon, where the local ESN association works with international students to create a semester course<sup>1</sup> in which every year, several incoming international students volunteer with a large

number of local social organisations. It can be taking care of the elderly, supporting schools, working with marginalised communities *etc.* Importantly, besides having a unique experience of community engaged learning, students also get ECTS for it, because of the students together with ESN and different academics from the university having advocated for this. So this is a great example of how when students organise and work together, involve alumni and staff, and have a clear strategy, they can totally shape and change educational practices.

Another example relates to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Until the very last day before the invasion, ESN's local associations in Ukraine were still helping international students who were there, doing welcome activities in Kiev for example. As soon as the war started, they didn't stop for a second, and they started to organise different ways to help Ukrainians abroad who were fleeing the country because of the invasion. This led to the creation of a sort of buddy system that was used by a number of students across Europe to try to find contacts. At the same time, the advocacy work done by ESN Ukraine and other organisations also contributed to changes in the Erasmus+ implementation that allowed more Ukrainian students to access Erasmus+ funds. So here we have two different practices that are completely different in terms of scope, but I think that they both show how a sense of agency and an understanding of the role of students can enable the student voice to take different shapes and have an impact.

**What is the perceived value of international student participation in Spain? Do you think this differs in other European countries and, if so, how?**

JRG: Spain has record numbers in Erasmus+ every year; students from all over Europe want to come to Spain. But when it comes to degree-seeking mobility, numbers are not as high as in other countries, even though they have been increasing in the last few years, due in particular to students from Latin America and from Europe who come on an exchange and then come back to pursue a Master's or a PhD, or maybe do another degree, *etc.* So I think Spaniards, Spanish society and the Spanish higher education sector really value internationalisation and how hosting international students is a positive thing.

I would say that the challenge in Spain is that, when it comes to how to channel all that potential brought in by international students, policy measures are not yet fully developed. There is still untapped potential to attract more students at the bachelor level and to build on the potential of the European Universities Initiative. Besides that, the national agency responsible for Erasmus+ does not have such a broad mandate in terms of internationalisation policy compared to similar agencies in other countries, which often have an overarching strategy to work in all things internationalisation. So I think that our priority area for the Spanish higher education sector can be to be more strategic in the way that we use all that human talent, so that more and more international students want to stay and take an active part in their communities.

**Can you give some examples of successful campaigns of activism by international students? Or is it perhaps the case that student activism is most effective when it has a broader basis of support (i.e. by all students) in a given institution or country?**

JRG: One important ongoing discussion in our sector is whether it is better to just have a greater number of grants which are at a lower amount but reach more students, or if it's more important to make sure that the grants awarded provide quality support that allows any student to benefit from mobility. In the international education sector, of course, we all want more students to go abroad, but there are different moments that create different needs and should therefore lead to different policy choices. In thinking about this question, in a focus group session at an event that Erasmus Student Network sections organise every year called Erasmus Generation Meeting, most of the participants there agreed that at this point in time, the important thing was to prioritise increasing the amount of the Erasmus+ grant. This confirmed the trends we had been seeing in our large-scale data collection efforts of the last few years. After a lot of advocacy towards the European Commission and other actors, this year the programme has brought one of the highest increases in Erasmus+ grants in the last few years, responding to the affordability crisis that young Europeans have been experiencing in the last few years. So basically, from next year Erasmus students will get extra travel support with a special focus on green travel, which will

increase grants by likely between 10% and 20% for most students.

This is a very material and specific change in the experience of thousands of students, and it was only possible because of the discussions and the contributions of not only a whole network of organisations, but also students on the ground who wanted to share their perspectives with us and reached us by email, social media or casual conversations. This is accompanied by many changes at the local level with universities that decide to change the way they give their grants

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**Whenever we want to create real change, we should always try to act as a network in all ways possible**

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or decide to look for some spare funds to improve the amount of the grant. It really shows the importance of multi-level advocacy: not thinking that “I have a problem that only affects me”, but really trying to establish connections with other organisations and other students, to see what problems we have in common and how we can create a common front. Whenever we want to create real change, we should always try to act as a network in all ways possible.

**In your current role with INGENIUM, how does this European Universities alliance ensure that it is listening to international student voices? Are there**

**formal mechanisms for this in the governance of the alliance? Or perhaps less formal mechanisms within the individual member institutions? What importance does input from international and/or mobile students have?**

JRG: European University alliances are able to do and to test things that, hopefully, can then be transferred to the whole higher education sector. That’s also true for student involvement and student engagement: the alliances provide us with an opportunity to create a European student body. The INGENIUM alliance recently established its student board, which will have an advisory role, but will also be represented in the two key decision-making bodies: an alliance council with the leaders of the universities, and a steering committee which deals with day-to-day issues. In the future, the alliance will incorporate students in all the key bodies, such as an academic committee that decides on the joint academic offer, an innovation committee, and quality assurance bodies. The idea – which I believe should be the blueprint for all alliances – is to have students represented across all the different bodies and different processes of the alliance. But even more important than that is to work on the engagement part of this equation, because having students represented in the decision-making process is key, but it is not enough. You will never be able to reach all students by simply having a couple of seats reserved to them in particular places. Beyond that, what is important is to also make sure that all students in the university see the alliance as a space for co-creation, dialogue and learning – as a platform where they can

propose new ideas. I think that both for my alliance, and for all alliances, the main priority is that all students and all members of the academic community see the alliance as a space that they’re also part of, where they belong and where they can have an impact, which circles back to the first question of the interview.

In the end, what we need is a combination of strong top-down leadership – in the sense that the leadership of the university should be committed to creating the conditions for participation and engagement – and bottom-up processes that are clearly defined. And I hope that the INGENIUM alliance will be able to provide a great example for the whole sector.

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1. <https://besancon.esfrance.org/projets-dengagement-social-et-citoyen/>



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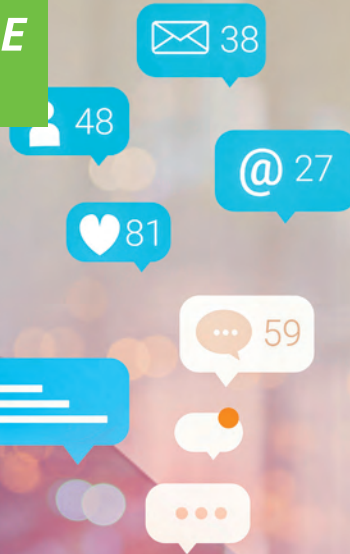
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