

Conference Conversation Starter

En Route!

TO MEANINGFUL IMPACT



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**EAIE Conference Conversation Starter
En Route!**

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Foreword

En route! In 2024, the international higher education community in Europe and beyond is unquestionably on the move. Global student and staff mobility numbers have rebounded dynamically in the post-pandemic era. The European Universities initiative of the European Commission has expanded to 64 alliances, and the Commission is actively planning for the post-2027 generation of EU-funded programmes, all focused on advancing the European Education Area. Political developments across Europe and around the world present both challenges and opportunities to internationalisation, and stakeholder groups are working diligently to respond to these developments. Many in our sector are on the frontlines of clarifying where rapid technological developments like artificial intelligence and virtual reality are leading us. There is also urgent attention being paid by the international higher education community to the road we are collectively traveling in the face of the global climate crisis.

Evidence of our collective forward momentum clearly abounds. But what do we really know about the difference our work is making? In other words, are the routes we are taking leading to the positive impact we seek? The essays that comprise this year's "EAIE Conference Conversation Starter" publication provide perspectives on this key question from three unique national perspectives.

Poland is moving to finalise a national strategy for internationalisation with their eyes squarely on the prize of 'societal progress' as a key outcome. This work is complicated by simultaneous concerns about how best to manage migration into Poland, which underscores the need to align intersecting stakeholder interests. In the UK, national champions for internationalisation, data on the financial benefits of hosting international students, and compelling case studies that highlight the positive effects of student mobility in the lives of real people are all targeting the 'impact imperative' that BREXIT so dramatically exposed. And in the Netherlands a challenging new political environment is raising the stakes for the country's key national advocate for internationalisation to produce robust, objective data that clarifies the role that internationalisation in higher education plays for Dutch society and the wider world.

Together, these examples from three very different national contexts provide real-world indications of how internationalisation's impact in higher education can be demonstrated and why this work matters. The national level or 'bird's eye' views presented in these essays are particularly useful in helping us to understand how macro-level dynamics can affect our work at the more 'micro-' or institutional level. To further facilitate this kind of thinking, discussion questions at the end of each essay invite readers to bring the authors' key arguments much closer to readers' own professional lives and work.

Whether by train, plane, automobile or bicycle, as we rush by the thousands toward EAIE's 34th Annual Conference and Exhibition in Toulouse this year, it behoves us all to carefully consider both 'the journey' and 'the destination' that are implied in our work. What part do each of us play in understanding and advancing internationalisation's impact? *En route* together, we're closer to finding out.



Laura E. Rumbley

EAIE Director for Knowledge Development and Research

Internationalisation in Polish higher education and the pathway to societal progress

— *By Ewa Kiszka and Edyta Lachowicz-Santos*

The concept of internationalisation in higher education has recently gained significant recognition among Polish policymakers, academics, and institutions. Particularly, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, with support from the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), has acknowledged the profound impact that internationalisation can have on both higher education institutions (HEIs) and the broader society. Grounded in particular characteristics of Polish history and contemporary realities, this strategic shift is aimed at attracting international talent to Poland, delivering graduates who are of the highest quality and responding to the necessity of international collaboration for scientific advancement. A forthcoming national strategy for internationalisation in higher education aims to sharpen Poland's focus in these key areas and ensure alignment with other important national priorities, including the integrity of the country's visa system. This article explores how key stakeholders in Poland view the impact of internationalisation, the desired outcomes of these efforts, and how Poland's approach compares to global aspirations.

ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

Key stakeholders, including university leaders, policymakers, and internationalisation professionals, see the enhancement of educational quality as a primary impact of internationalisation. Exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives enriches the curriculum and the learning experience, fostering critical thinking, creativity, innovation and skill development. This prepares students to navigate and contribute effectively to a globalised world, and to Poland's place in it.

If internationalisation bolsters educational quality, educational quality is in turn seen to attract international talent, something that Poland actively aspires to. Last year, the country celebrated reaching the milestone of enrolling 100,000 international students,

a target met thanks to intensive promotion campaigns. However, this still represents a lower percentage of total enrolment in the higher education sector when compared to many European Union countries. Like much of Europe, Poland struggles with a decline in student intake each year due to demographic changes and elevated levels of migration from outside Europe, an issue that has recently raised many concerns. Internationalisation in higher education is thus perceived to deliver both a qualitative and quantitative impact on the educational experience and system.

PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Stakeholders emphasise that internationalisation promotes tolerance and open-mindedness. By studying and collaborating with individuals from various cultural backgrounds, students develop a broader worldview and greater empathy, which are essential for peaceful coexistence and effective problem-solving in today's interconnected world.

Poland's historical and cultural context adds a unique dimension to this aspect. Given its diverse past and current sociopolitical landscape, marked by tragedies such as the war in neighbouring Ukraine, fostering an environment where students can interact with peers from different backgrounds is crucial for overcoming prejudices and building a more inclusive society. This, in turn, helps mitigate xenophobia and promotes social harmony.

The commitment to internationalisation is also driven by Poland's desire to break away from its past marked by Iron Curtain isolation and enhance its global standing and influence. By participating actively in international education networks such as the European Association for International Education (EAIE), Poland seeks to position itself as a leader in education and research, contributing to global knowledge and innovation.

FOSTERING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

There is also a strong belief among stakeholders that international experiences instil a sense of social responsibility in Polish students. By understanding global challenges and witnessing disparities firsthand, students become more committed to making a positive impact on society, understanding the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Internationalisation encourages students to engage in service-learning projects, internships, and research that address global issues such as poverty, climate change, and public health. These experiences both enhance their academic and professional skills and foster a commitment to social justice and ethical leadership, which can have positive knock-on effects for Poland's society at large.

These aspects are particularly focused on and emphasised in the European Universities alliances, a flagship initiative of the "[European strategy for universities](#)". Poland holds a strong position in this undertaking, with 32 Polish higher education institutions involved in the 64 European Universities alliances from across Europe.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY OF INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In light of these perspectives and aspirations, since January 2024 the Polish government, through NAWA, has been developing a National Strategy of Internationalisation of Higher Education. This strategy is being crafted jointly by university leaders, policymakers, internationalisation professionals, and doctoral student organisation representatives.

The strategy development process involves extensive consultation and collaboration with a wide range of key stakeholders, from marketing and public relations experts, to policymakers, international students and researchers and more. This inclusive approach ensures that the strategy reflects the diverse needs and perspectives of the higher education community, across different institutions and disciplines. This collaborative effort is essential for creating a cohesive and effective framework for internationalisation and ensuring the strategy's impact is substantive and far-reaching.

The National Strategy aims to outline clear objectives and priorities for internationalisation. These include enhancing the quality of education, increasing research output and impact, promoting cultural exchange, and driving economic growth. The strategy also emphasises the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment for international students and scholars by, for example, improving administrative processes, providing adequate support services, and fostering a welcoming campus culture.

To ensure the successful implementation of the strategy, NAWA and other relevant bodies will provide support and resources to HEIs, for example via funding for internationalisation initiatives, training for faculty and staff, and platforms for sharing best practices. The strategy will also call for the establishment of a central data collection system, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and measure the impact of internationalisation efforts. This data-driven approach will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the strategy remains relevant and effective.

OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES: MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION

While one team launched the process of developing the Strategy of Internationalisation, another ministry started to prepare the Migration Strategy of the Republic of Poland. This process was prompted by revelations of serious malpractice in recent years, essentially involving visa fraud. In May 2024, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented the so called "White Book," a document outlining proposals to eliminate irregularities in the visa system.

While there is a common understanding of the need to address this serious problem, widespread scepticism has been expressed by the Polish higher education community about the White Book. They argue that it risks generalising the malpractices of a few institutions across the sector as a whole and may limit the intake of international students. This might inadvertently hinder the growth of internationalisation efforts, which are vital for the educational and cultural enrichment of Polish universities.

To ensure complementarity between the internationalisation and migration strategies, key stakeholders have been actively seeking common ground. These include four ministries, including the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, government organisations such as NAWA and the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE), the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP), the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA), the National Information Processing Institute (OPI), the Board of Education, university leaders and internationalisation professionals, led by the IROS Forum.

As a result, proposals and recommendations for implementation in legal and practical areas, as well as a series of articles for the most important portal for the Polish academic and scientific community—the Academic Forum—have recently been put forward. While still a work in progress, the first visible changes of these efforts include increased cooperation among Polish institutions, proposals to streamline the visa process, and many other qualitative improvements in the recruitment of students, doctoral candidates, and foreign workers.

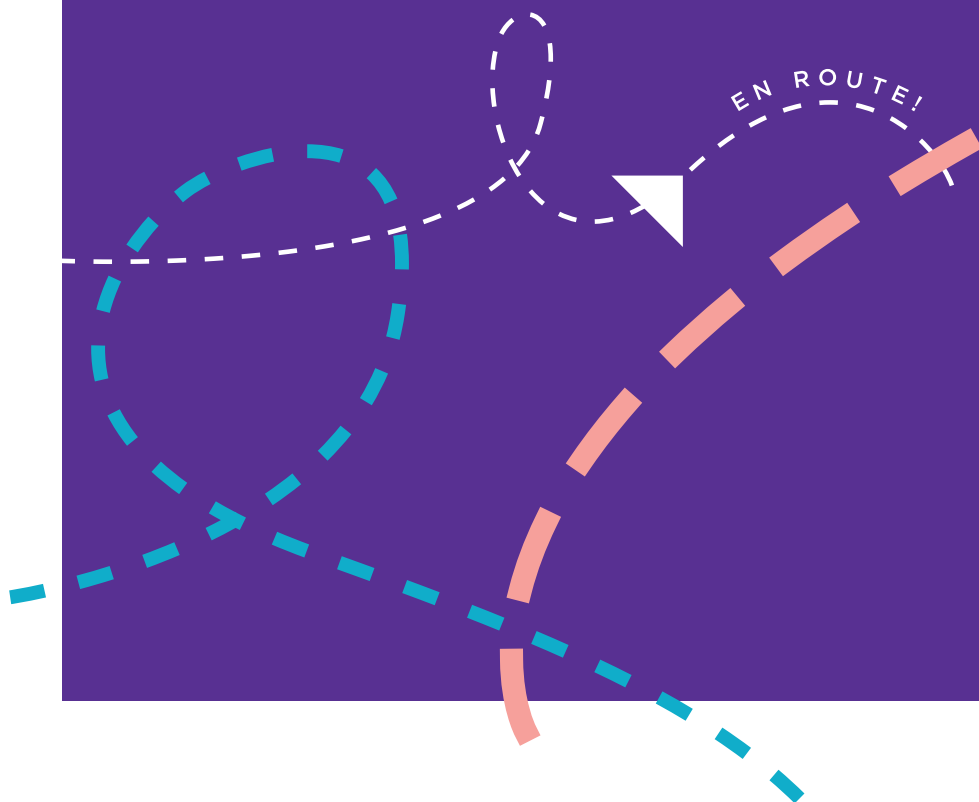
CONCLUSION

Internationalisation is a priority for Poland. This is evident in the increasing number of international students, educators, and scientists in Poland, the growing number of study programmes conducted in foreign languages, and the collaborative scientific projects being conducted with international researchers. Attracting talent is a central element of Poland's development strategy, while enhancing educational and research quality, promoting tolerance and open-mindedness, and fostering social responsibility among students are key areas in which the country seeks to achieve impact from its internationalisation strategy. As Poland prepares to hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2025, there is significant momentum behind its internationalisation efforts, which can further enhance its influence and collaborative position on the European educational landscape.

Poland of course faces unique challenges, but it also shares common aspirations with the global higher education community. Its commitment to international collaboration and cultural exchange positions it as an active participant in addressing global challenges. The National Strategy of Internationalisation, along with efforts to harmonise this vision with migration policies, reflects Poland's comprehensive approach to achieving its goals. This ultimately contributes to societal progress and global interconnectedness, impacts that Poland strongly believes in striving for.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This essay talks about promoting tolerance and open-mindedness and fostering social responsibility among students as key areas in which Poland seeks to achieve impact from its internationalisation strategy (a clear focus on societal progress). Is this similar to your country (or your institution)? If not, in what ways does your country (or institution) aspire to have an impact on students through internationalisation? What are the reasons behind this?
2. Internationalisation can have a profound impact on both higher education institutions (HEIs) and the broader society in which HEIs operate. Where does your institution mainly seek to make an impact: on your own institution, or on society at large? Why do you think this is?



The impact imperative of internationalisation in a shifting geopolitical climate: A UK perspective

— *By Michelle Stewart*

The global geopolitical landscape is experiencing a period of seismic change with unprecedented challenges for higher education that directly affect internationalisation. As education professionals, we live and breathe internationalisation, and the EAIE has a strategic focus to drive responsible and impactful international education.

In the current climate where internationalisation is arguably under threat from the rise of nationalism and right-wing politics, the challenge is not, as we say in the UK, ‘to preach to the choir;’ rather, it is making sure we articulate the benefits more widely and engage the more sceptical or resistant within our communities to recognise the internationalisation imperative. Within our community of higher education professionals, we must find ways to communicate the tangible benefits of internationalisation and ensure that we are equipped to withstand threats and are ready to explore opportunities.

At an institutional level, within the UK context, global factors may directly affect the level of strategic prioritisation of internationalisation and its related resourcing and reach. BREXIT has cast a long shadow over the UK higher education sector, impacting our collaborative opportunities, our access to funding and mobility mechanisms and of course the external perception of our cultural ethos and willingness to engage with our European partners. However, an unintended benefit of BREXIT (we have so few, if any, positives) has been the UK higher education sector’s ability to communicate the value of internationalisation. Perhaps Plato was right to suggest that our need will be the real creator or, as we now say, necessity is the mother of invention. Internationalisation advocates in the UK have been resolute in our drive to amplify the power of internationalisation and convince stakeholders of the need to continue to embrace internationalisation at the institutional, sectoral and national level.

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

We are extremely fortunate in the UK to have organisations dedicated to supporting universities in this endeavour. Both Universities UK and UUK International (UUKi) campaign for public and political [recognition of universities' impact](#) on local, national, and international communities. With the new Labour Government in power following the recent UK General Election, there appears, so far, to be some cause for optimism that a more progressive approach to engagement with Europe and global relations may be on the horizon. The lobbying and communication role of UUK and UUKi will be pivotal in shaping the future framework and impact on internationalisation.

Measuring impact is not easy, but it is critical. We must ensure there is a broader understanding within our institutions of comprehensive internationalisation and the higher education sector should strive to embed evaluation tools to assess the impact of research that is undertaken through international collaboration, hosting international students and outward student mobility. This will help inform future activity and analyse past performance. So, how has the UK been addressing the challenges of demonstrating impact in these areas? A variety of mechanisms have been deployed to advance this work.

RESEARCH IMPACT

In the UK, research is measured using the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and this includes impact assessment. The REF defines impact as an *effect or benefit beyond academia*. It encompasses changes in the economy, society, culture, public services, health and quality of life. Maps of impact case studies show the local and global spread of research impact by type and research area. [These maps highlight the positive influence of UK research across different domains.](#)

ECONOMIC IMPACT

At a time when there is huge pressure on public finances, evidencing ways in which universities generate economic growth sends a powerful message. The [2023 UUKi report](#) shows how international students impact the UK economy. As of 2022, international students who began their studies in 2021–22 contributed £14.8 bn to the UK economy. The Graduate Route, a visa that allows international students to remain in the UK to work, has driven substantial growth in international enrolments from 2019–20 to the present time and UUKi modelling suggests that this has contributed to 632,000 additional international first-year enrolments over the 5-year period 2019–20 to 2023–24. This is equivalent to an additional net economic contribution of £62.6 bn to the UK economy.

Demonstrating the quantitative economic impact of international students is *relatively* easy, and in the UK university leaders understand the financial imperative to succeed in this arena. It is much more challenging to make the case for outward student mobility. Of course, we can report on numbers but assessing the impact on individuals is more qualitative and that is difficult to measure and communicate.

STUDENT MOBILITY

After leaving the European Union in 2020, the UK replaced the Erasmus+ student mobility scheme with the UK-wide Turing Scheme. This scheme funds outward mobility only. In Wales, though, the Taith programme, which was established in March 2022,

funds both inward and outward mobility, and also includes the Youth and Adult Education sectors. Socio-economic inclusivity is a key focus of both schemes as is prioritising widening access and the need to diversify participation by enabling more students to study abroad as well as a requirement to [ensure cost effectiveness](#).

Since the launch of the Turing Scheme in 2021, over 50,000 higher education (HE) students from the UK have participated in outward mobility placements abroad, while Taith aims to support 12,164 participants with the grants awarded in its first two years.

LEARNING FROM TAITH

Taith is a wonderful example of a creative and innovative response to the need to find new models that stimulate student mobility. Its refreshed strategy, launched in Autumn 2023, reflects its core focus on impact, and on access and inclusion for underrepresented groups. Taith has a target, set by the Welsh Government, to ensure that 40% of participants hail from underrepresented groups. For the Pathway 1 2024 funding call, they set a mandatory requirement that all projects should include at least 25% of participants from underrepresented groups. Furthermore, they dedicate resources to highlight case studies of programmes with the greatest impact. This enables them to demonstrate the life-changing impact that international mobilities can have on those who face greater challenges, and to show other organisations working with similar individuals that they too could apply for, and receive, Taith funding.

Some examples of Taith programmes demonstrating significant impact include the *Canolfan Addysg Conwy* pupil referral unit for learners facing challenges in mainstream education and *Ysgol Pen y Bryn*, the largest special needs school in Swansea for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a wide range of additional learning needs. These specific examples are focused on school-age participants, but of course Taith's remit encompasses the higher education sector, as well.

At *Canolfan Addysg Conwy* most of the learners suffer with mental health issues brought about by anxiety and low self-confidence following traumatic mainstream school experiences. In February 2024, a group of learners and accompanying staff travelled to Finland. For many of the learners it was their first time out of Wales, and provided them with an opportunity to develop skills, build confidence, and to open their eyes to a new country and culture. [Watch the video](#) to hear from the learners and staff all about their life changing trip, and the impact it had on them.

Ysgol Pen y Bryn pupils have a wide range of academic needs and many come from a background of deprivation. In March 2024 the school took seven pupils and staff to Florida to participate in lessons at two American institutions and the pupils also had the opportunity to take part in work experiences with pupils from Orange County. The trip has resulted in pupils feeling more confident and capable and to develop their life skills for the future.

Taith also provides funding for mobilities of as short a duration as two weeks, for studying, working, or volunteering abroad. This allows universities to attract and mobilise more students from under-represented groups, given that these populations may

face particular financial and/or time constraints that make short-term experiences much more viable. Although Taith continues to promote and offer traditional semester and year abroad placements, the advantage of short-term mobility for expanding access has been highlighted in UUKi reporting.

MOVING BEYOND THE NUMBERS

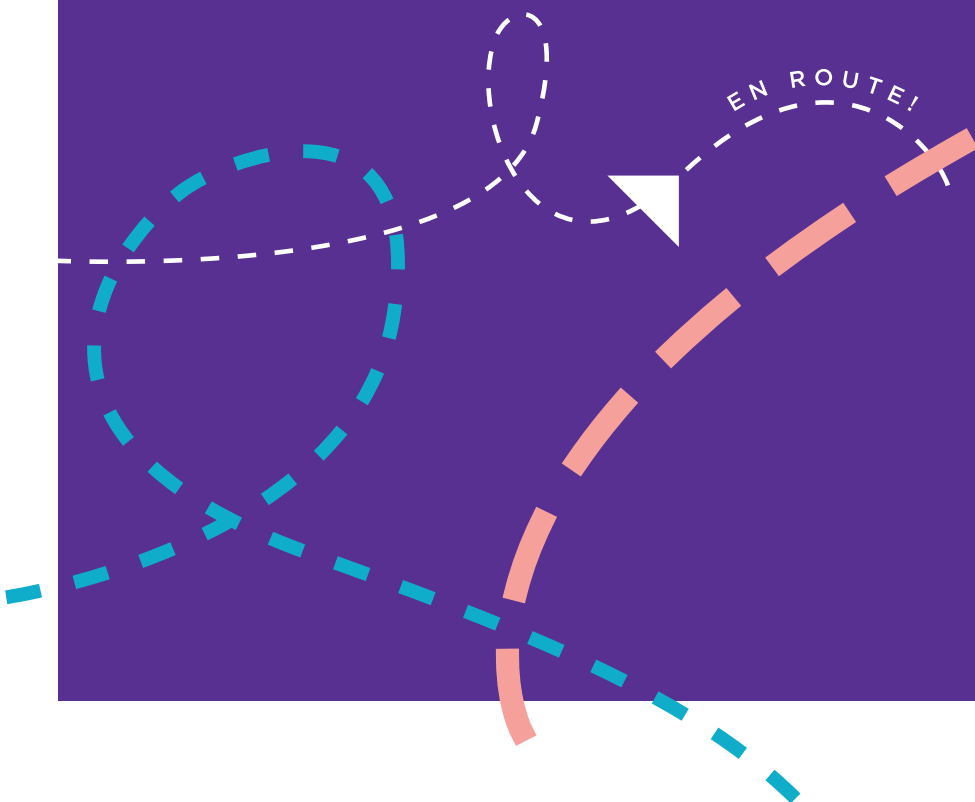
When it comes to student mobility, is there a case to move beyond the numbers? Could we, as with the REF, describe impact as *an effect or benefit to the individual*: changes to their personal and professional progression and broader career prospects; contribution to society; enhancements to their quality of life?

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, commentators often spoke of us living in unprecedented times and, although hackneyed, this also applies to the current landscape for internationalisation. BREXIT has unquestionably had a profound and lasting impact on internationalisation in the UK's higher education sector. Moreover, like colleagues within and outside the EU, we have also been affected by other global factors. The challenges are not lessening but the resolve of the sector to engage internationally and to maintain the UK's global outlook and impact is both unwavering and incontrovertible. We will continue to lobby for change. We must also act institutionally and collectively to protect the gains we have made and to future-proof our activities. This is vital to ensure we continue to thrive as international institutions and harness the power of internationalisation to foster greater understanding and contribute to solving our shared global challenges.

The impact imperative does pose several challenges for our sector, but finding a response will help us to: effectively measure the personal and professional growth of students beyond traditional metrics; articulate the impact of internationalisation on societal contributions and quality of life; ensure that the benefits of internationalisation are equitably distributed among all students; and collectively lobby for change to protect and enhance internationalisation efforts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Due to geopolitical events such as BREXIT, the UK IHE sector has found itself in a position where amplifying the power of internationalisation and convincing stakeholders of the need to continue to embrace international education and collaboration seems more important than ever. What is the (geo)political reality like in your country? Do you recognise this feeling of urgency to advocate for or demonstrate the impact of internationalisation, or is it something you could envision within your own country?
2. In this essay various examples are given of how different UK stakeholders measure impact, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) to measure research impact and research from UUKi on the economic impact of international students coming into the country. Do you have any examples of impact measurement to share from your own institution/country?



Balancing complexities in the Netherlands: Nuffic's mission and the contribution of research in enhancing impact

— *By Margje van Wijk-Geurts, Florine Sneathlage, Bas Beisiegel, Willeke van der Werf and Kasper van der Toorn*

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND GOVERNMENTAL POLICY

In recent years, the Anglicisation of higher education and the rising influx of international students have elicited significant attention in political discussions and media coverage in the Netherlands. The positive impacts of internationalisation – such as enhanced educational quality, improved institutional cooperation, knowledge circulation, enhanced global accessibility to education services, inclusive policies, and fostering cultural exchange – are often recognised. However, there are growing concerns about the broader implications of increased international student numbers on other areas of society, such as the pressured housing market. Concerns like these, as well as issues related to sustainability, brain drain and the danger of knowledge theft, are widely acknowledged and mostly linked to physical student mobility rather than other forms of internationalisation in education, such as [Internationalisation at Home](#).

National data indicates an imbalance between incoming and outgoing students. The number of international students coming to the Netherlands is considerably higher than that of Dutch students studying abroad, who also tend to spend shorter periods abroad for their studies. In response to the growing concerns about the increasing international student numbers and the potential negative effects of internationalisation, the white paper “Internationalisation in Balance” was introduced in 2018 ([Internationalisering in Evenwicht, 2018](#)). This white paper resulted in legislation, recently submitted to the House of Representatives, aimed at fostering a more balanced and coordinated approach to internationalisation in Dutch higher education ([Wet Internationalisering in Balans, 2024](#)). Additionally, a significant shift towards the political right is evident in the Netherlands. The new government's plans indicate

a desire to scale back internationalisation activities and reduce funding for higher education. Against this complex political and social backdrop, there is important work to be done to ensure that internationalisation in Dutch higher education is both fostered and rigorously evaluated to ensure its impacts are meaningful for this society.

NUFFIC'S MISSION AND POLICY IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Nuffic is the expertise centre in the Netherlands for internationalisation of education, with statutory tasks that include diploma evaluation and recognition, providing information on studying abroad and in the Netherlands, managing scholarship programmes, and conducting independent research on internationalisation. By effectively carrying out these activities, Nuffic aims to help build a peaceful and prosperous society for everyone.

According to Nuffic, internationalisation of education in all its forms brings a net positive impact, both to Dutch society and to the global stage, and stimulation of internationalisation is therefore a designated policy-task derived from the mission of Nuffic. The current shift towards greater isolation and withdrawal from the global community is in opposition to Nuffic's belief in internationalisation's positive impact and runs contrary to the trend-setting profile with respect to internationalisation that Dutch higher education has enjoyed for many years. So, it may be more important now than ever to demonstrate this impact.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH TO DEMONSTRATE IMPACT AND ADVISE ON POLICYMAKING

Nuffic emphasises the importance of a balanced approach to internationalisation of higher education to address the challenges of a changing society and recognises that demonstrating impact requires presenting concrete results and evidence of the outcomes and effectiveness of actions and initiatives. As such, the independence of research is important: *ie* its task is not to produce impact or positive impact outcomes, but rather to objectively evaluate, monitor and demonstrate impact.

To this end, Nuffic's research focuses on several key goals. It contributes to optimising Nuffic's performance as an organisation, strengthening its ability to undertake its statutory tasks and contribute to societal goals. It also informs government policymakers by providing evidence on the impact of internationalisation in education. Moreover, research plays an important role in also helping the stakeholders Nuffic serves to refine activities, identify gaps, and explore ways to increase future impact. Therefore, conducting research is essential for guiding future governmental and organisational policies. As impact usually takes place at individual, organisational and societal level, all three levels need to be taken into consideration when doing research.

OVERVIEW OF NUFFIC'S IMPACT RESEARCH

Mobility-data (the Netherlands)

By continuously researching trends in [incoming](#) and [outgoing](#) mobility, analysing [stay rates of international students after graduation](#), and presenting insights and data through facts and figures in [interactive dashboards](#), Nuffic acts upon the need for data and evidence-informed policies. Critically, it adds depth and perspective to

ongoing political discussions. An example of how Nuffic has contributed to political decision-making processes can be seen in the social-cost benefit analysis conducted in 2020 in support of decision-making regarding the continuation of the Holland Alumni Network. This analysis found that the costs of the alumni network would be recovered through the contributions of alumni who stay in the Netherlands and contribute to the economy.

Furthermore, tracer studies and evaluation reports for large-scale capacity building programmes such as the Orange Knowledge Programme and Erasmus+ demonstrate the impact of these initiatives on Dutch society.

Orange Knowledge Programme (Global)

The Orange Knowledge Scholarship Programme is a Dutch global development programme managed by Nuffic and funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme contributes to societies' social and economic development by strengthening knowledge and skills of professionals and organisations.

In 2024, a tracer study will be published, examining the mid- to long-term effects of the Orange Knowledge Programme on professionals, the organisations they work for, and society more broadly. The tracer study illustrates how a programme for individuals can ultimately drive organisational impact.

Erasmus+ programme (Europe)

As the Dutch national agency for Erasmus+, Nuffic is actively involved in measuring the programme's effectiveness. A January 2024 impact study by [ResearchNed](#) assessed the long-term effects of Erasmus+ on the development of intercultural competences for higher education students. The results showed lasting benefits, with 97% of former participants reporting a positive impact on their personal lives today, even five years later. Students highlighted their improved independence, language skills, intercultural sensitivity, communication, professional abilities, and adaptability.

OTHER TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO ASSESS IMPACT

Tools and instruments are also key resources in the quest to demonstrate impact. In this vein, Nuffic has developed an [international competences model](#) to provide insights into the competences students develop through an international experience, which illustrates the impact of internationalisation on a personal level. And in order to frontload the thinking about impact even before internationalisation projects are launched, Nuffic developed the [Erasmus+ impact tool](#) to support organisations applying for Erasmus+ project funding in recognising impact and designing impactful projects. The tool, which is provided in combination with training, has been adopted by other National Agencies in a 'long-term agreement', in which 12 countries are collaborating on a joint understanding and approach towards impact in mobility exchanges. In the past academic year, Nuffic also launched the [Quickscan](#), a tool that provides educational institutions with insights into their internationalisation efforts through a brief questionnaire. Institutions receive tailored recommendations based on four themes, guiding them on how to further develop and better understand the impact of their internationalisation activities.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH TO IMPROVE IMPACT IN PRACTICE

Improving impact and enhancing the measurability of results (such as data quality and availability, but also recognition of impact) requires a dedicated approach that supports education providers in planning for impact. Yet, despite its critical importance, analysis of the impact of internationalisation of higher education is hampered by a lack of methods to assess outcome and impact. This is true for student mobility activities but also for global development activities, an area in which attribution of societal developments to specific interventions is extremely complicated.

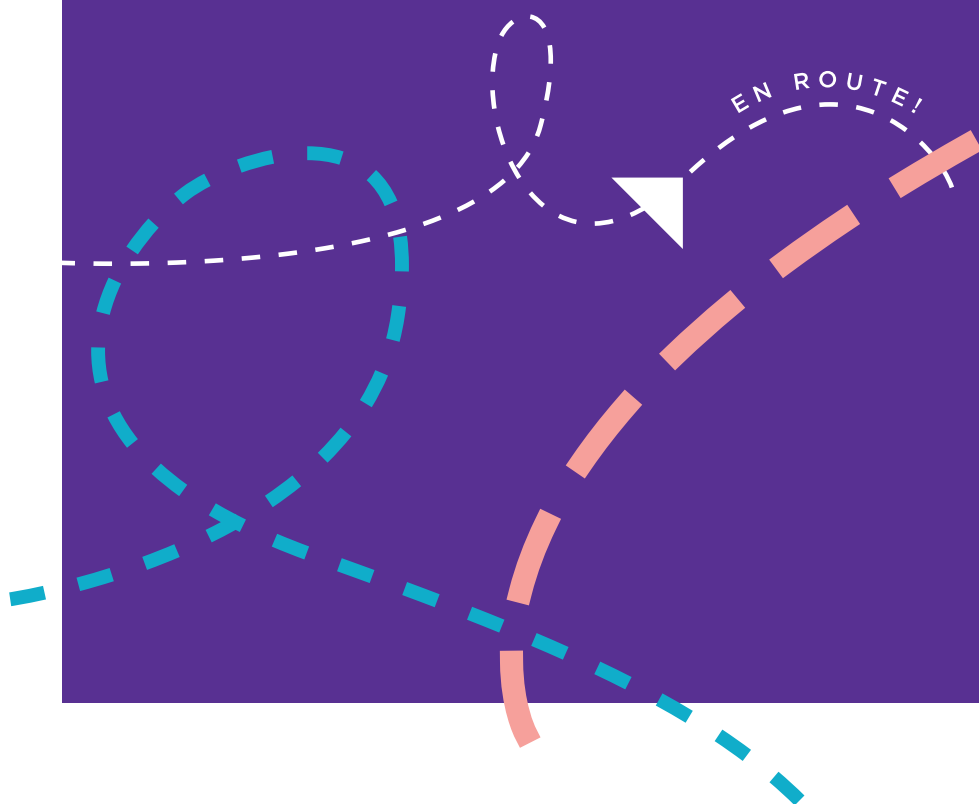
To address this challenge, Nuffic has worked with a Theory of Change (ToC), which is a written description of the strategies, actions, conditions and resources that facilitate change and achieve outcomes in a particular context. This approach helps to focus on impact with all stakeholders, eventually contributing to inclusive sustainable development. For example, revised and newly designed curricula, in addition to training of educational staff, leads to improved performance of knowledge institutions and better and sustainable education systems. Also, knowledge and practice exchange in relevant networks is a deliberate strategy. Education systems that are relevant and accessible produce skilled graduates equipped with up-to-date knowledge and lead to more inclusive educational environments. Initiatives grounded in ToC approaches foster noticeable change that leads to a renewed educational climate in the partner countries, which in turn leads to societal impact.

Research results provide evidence-based insights that help refine strategies, improve practices, and increase impact. By revealing what works well and identifying areas for enhancement, research enables organisations to make informed adjustments to their initiatives. This ongoing refinement ensures that internationalisation efforts are effective and aligned with their goals.

Notwithstanding the current increased resistance to welcoming international students and researchers in many countries and a growing debate on migration in general, Nuffic believes in the value of internationalisation and international cooperation and aims to put student mobility into perspective by illustrating its key contributions to our societies and the global community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As discussed in this essay, changing policies and political contexts can put pressure on organisational policies and require resilience. How can organisations build resilience while maintaining their independence, particularly in a political climate and societal environment that is becoming more isolated from the global community? How can they continue to demonstrate their impact effectively under these circumstances?
2. This essay mentions impact on three levels: individual, institutional, and societal level. Which level is most prominently represented in your institution's strategy and research? Is there an equal emphasis on demonstrating impact across these three levels?



About the authors

Ewa Kiszka is the head of the University Internationalisation Office at the Medical University of Gdańsk (MUG), Poland. She chairs the International Relation Offices Forum network of international cooperation offices. Kiszka specialises in issues concerning the internationalisation of the University, international cooperation and mobility, marketing and promotion of the university abroad, support, relations and integration of the foreign part of the university community. She also promotes MUG abroad, co-organises promotional trips, establishes contacts with foreign institutions, publishes texts on internationalisation and creates cooperation networks. She is a member of various professional organisations, including the EAIE, IRO Forum and PRom Association and acts as a representative of MUG in numerous projects concerning internationalisation. She is the author and co-creator of many events and campaigns aimed at improving the intercultural competence of the university community and supporting and integrating the foreign part of the MUG community.

Edyta Lachowicz-Santos is the director of the Internationalisation Office at the University of Economics in Katowice (UEKat) and is a member of the EAIE's General Council. For many years, Edyta has been actively involved in positioning Polish universities as valuable partners and professionals on the international stage. At UEKat, she coordinates the implementation of the main objectives of the university's Internationalisation Strategy, including obtaining international accreditations. She is also involved with the European University Bauhaus4EU, of which UEKat is a partner. Since 2018, Edyta has been collaborating with the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) as an expert and consultant, conducting training sessions and publishing her work. In 2020 and 2022, as the sole representative from Poland, she was elected to the General Council of the EAIE. From September 2024, she will serve as a member of the EAIE Board.

Michelle Stewart is the Immediate Past President of the EAIE. She has been involved in higher education for over thirty years, working at both the Universities of Strathclyde (1993–2024) and Stirling (2014–2016). After graduating in Public Administration, she spent four years in Spain where she developed executive education courses. When she returned to Scotland, she was an adviser to the Lord Provost, Glasgow City Council. Having worked in internationalisation for several years, Michelle has a strong commitment to partnership development and student mobility. Michelle is currently Chairperson of the Taith (Welsh student mobility programme) Finance Committee and she recently joined DUOLINGO English Test UK Advisory Group. Previously she has served on external boards including: Operating Board Education UK Partnership; Chair, Scottish Universities International Group; and Chair, British Universities Transatlantic Exchange Association. She has an extensive network of colleagues across the UK and overseas.

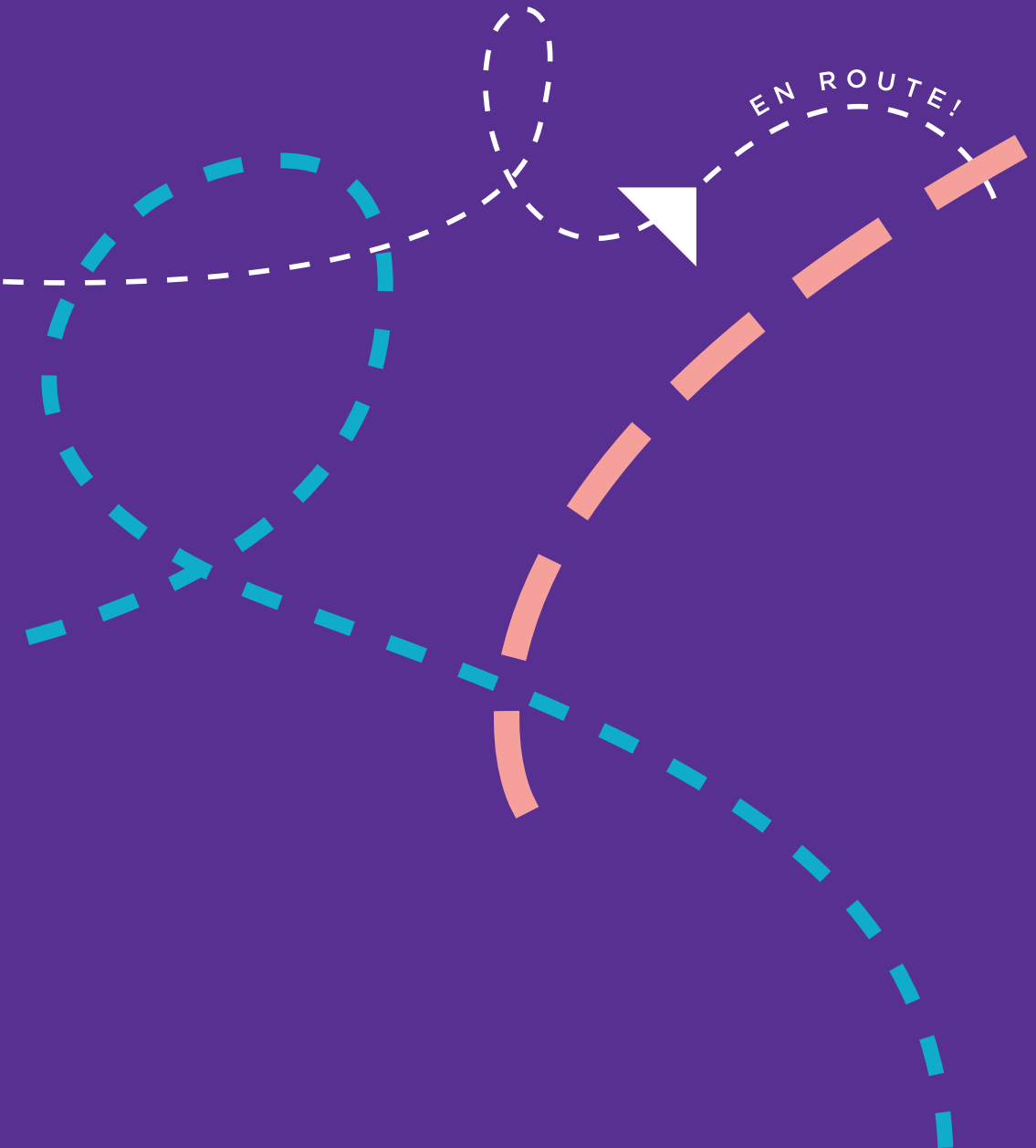
Margje van Wijk-Geurts is a senior policy officer at Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education. Based in the Hague, the Netherlands, she works closely with Nuffic's international offices. She has (co-)authored (policy) reports and articles on student mobility, trends and developments in international education, and the changing perspectives on internationalisation in the Netherlands. During her tenure with Nuffic, Margje has also worked as project manager and as program administrator for capacity development programs in Africa. Margje is an international education professional with experience in the administration of competitive scholarship programs, institutional cooperation and program management. Prior to joining Nuffic, she worked at IE Business School in Madrid, Spain, and at Harvard University, LASPAU: Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Margje holds an M.A. in European Studies from the University of Amsterdam and PRINCE2 project management certification.

Florine Snethlage is a communications advisor at Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education. She is a broadly oriented communication professional with a strong emphasis on working with international students, particularly through the coordination of the Study in NL student ambassador programme. In her role as communications advisor, Florine has contributed to reports on incoming degree mobility, developed content, and organised various events for Study in NL. She has also managed international fairs under a European service contract aimed at attracting students to Europe. She is skilled in developing communication strategies that reach audiences in academic and international settings, as well as in shaping policy-oriented texts and articles. After completing a Bachelor's degree in International Communication and Media at Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, Florine pursued a Master's in Communication Science at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, with a specialisation in media psychology.

Bas Beisiegel works as an impact coordinator and policy advisor at Erasmus+/Nuffic. He is an experienced Director with a demonstrated history in organisational development in Eastern and Southern Africa, Asia and Europe for public and private organisations. A conceptual thinker with a hands-on attitude, he possesses a strong ability to translate theory into practice. Bas is skilled in design, implementation and closing large scale and complex programmes in challenging environments, as well as senior consultancy and capacity building experience in Results Based Management, Risk Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, Accountability and Financial Management.

Willeke van der Werf currently works as a researcher for Erasmus+/Nuffic on internationalisation in education. After her studies in Organisational Sociology, Willeke worked as a researcher at Utrecht University and Tilburg University. Via practicing research, she started to work in research coordination and/or policy in several Dutch Ministries, including the Ministry of Education the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Research and Development Department. As a senior policy-officer, policy-advisor and coordinator, she worked over 21 years within the Ministries, predominantly in policy on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. She represented The Netherlands in OECD and EU working groups, and also the European Quality Framework for ECEC. She also worked on policy innovation in several projects. In 2020, she finished her PhD on Diversity, Inclusion and Quality of ECEC in the Dutch Hybrid Childcare System, titled: The Intermediary Role of Organizations between Policy and Practice.

Kasper van der Toorn is a policy officer at Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for the internationalisation of education. In this role, he focuses on the Dutch political landscape, impact development, strategic advice and project management. As a member of the Strategy, Knowledge, and Innovation team, he contributes to the publication of research, advisory reports, and innovative projects such as the Nuffic Quickscan. Kasper holds a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration from The Hague University of Applied Sciences and a Master's degree in Public Sector Management, specialising in Governance and Advisory, from Leiden University. With experience in stakeholder management, multi-level governance, and impact management, he is an eager young professional. Alongside his professional career, he volunteers for the Villa Joep Foundation, a charitable organisation dedicated to funding research on neuroblastoma childhood cancer.



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