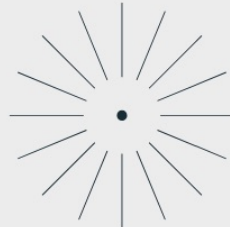


TIPs for success

***The T@UU
Internationalisation
Project (TIP)***



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*** TIPS for Success ***

The T@UU Internationalisation Project (TIP)

This Report: Some Instructions for Use

- **For Whom?** For anyone at Utrecht University who might be interested in questions related to internationalisation-related debates.
- **By Whom?** By Lorena De Vita and Femke van de Glind, T@UU Council member (2020-2024) and T@UU project leader (2022-), respectively.
- **Why?** This report originates from discussions held among Dutch and international teaching (and research) members of staff. While internationalisation at Dutch universities has become a 'hot topic' in the media in recent months, the internal discussion at the UU is different from, and largely predates, it. With this report, we want to give voice to our teaching community (interpreted in a broad sense) to share some bottom-up feedback about internationalisation at the UU that we have gathered over the past three years and offer some ideas which, we think, might be TIPS for success when handling internationalisation at various levels.

Summary

What does it mean to be part of an international University? Over the past three years, the T@UU has been pursuing an agenda of enhanced connection and inclusion of, and among, members of staff and students at Utrecht University. One key pillar of our work is dedicated to paying attention to the connection between Dutch and international staff, and students, across the University.

There are clear indicators that the topic deserves attention. This became especially evident in the wake of the publication of the parliamentary letter of Minister Dijkgraaf on managing international student flows in higher education.¹ However, the discussion within the T@UU community had started much earlier than that and aims at addressing fundamental strategic issues, not last-minute political trends.

In this report, the T@UU reflects on the evidence gathered over three years (2020-2023), through online and in-person one-to-one meetings, as well as two rounds of workshops. Such meetings and workshops were conducted with academic staff, support staff, and students from a variety of Departments within the University. They took place during a period which was particularly tumultuous, characterized by two main challenges. On the one hand, the outbreak of the global pandemic, and the huge effects that this had on the UU community. On the other, the recent debates regarding the possible restriction of the number of international students to be admitted at Dutch universities.

¹ Rijksoverheid, 'Kamerbrief over beheersing internationale studentenstromen in het hoger onderwijs', Available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2023/04/21/beheersing-internationale-studentenstromen-in-het-hoger-onderwijs> Last accessed: 19 February 2024].

The report starts by conceptualizing internationalisation as an important aspect of education and research at Utrecht University. It also emphasizes the different understandings of what internationalisation might mean among a variety of members of the community, and it highlights the opportunities for further common growth. Considering this, the report presents an overview of topics that have come up for discussion repeatedly and that, as authors of this report, we argue warrant further attention on the part of the University.

These concern:



- **Harnessing existing know-how, making knowledge explicit, and recognizing existing synergies**



- **Enhancing language inclusivity**



- **Learning from the successes of a thriving (inter)national teaching and learning community**

We suggest three key action points, which are elaborated upon at p. 6 of this report:



Introduction

This report aims to further dialogue on behalf of, and with, scholars engaged with teaching at Utrecht University. So: Let's start with a board! Below are (some of) the responses that we gathered at the remote sessions organized on internationalisation, early in the day, while the pandemic was still raging. We will unpack some of these answers and suggestions further below. For now, it is important to clarify that the session started from the following key consideration: Utrecht University is – in so many ways – an international university. Many members of staff, in various roles, are international; those who are Dutch have often long-standing experiences of working in, or with colleagues from, other countries. Many of the University's students are international students; this includes both students who are here on exchange as well as students who are enrolled at courses taught at the UU. The students who are Dutch often chose to pursue at least part of their studies abroad through partnerships and programs such as Erasmus. Wandering around the campuses and departments in Utrecht, one hears a great variety of different languages. Perhaps most importantly, the UU is a university which is internationally recognized for the high-standards of its teaching and research activities.

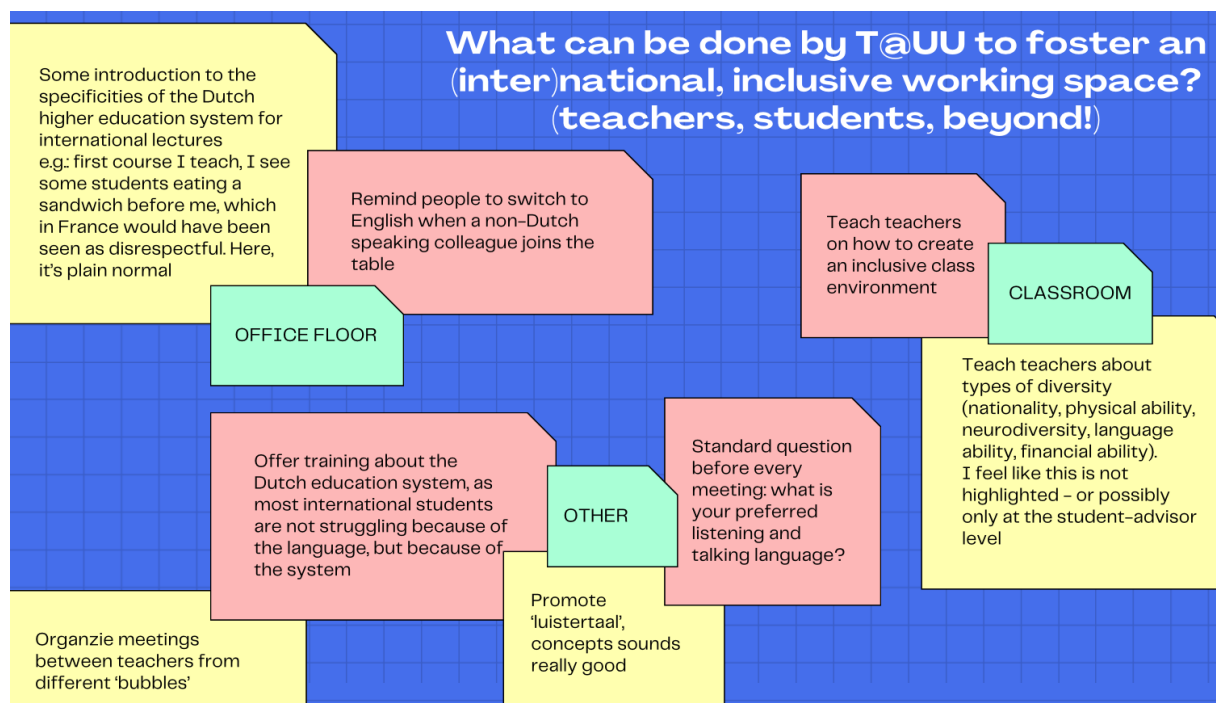


Figure 1: Graphic re-elaboration on the basis of the responses gathered at the VJOW Session: 'How do you see me? International lecturers at the (g)local university', 29 June 2021

So how did the UU community react to the message of wanting to achieve 'balance in internationalisation', as formulated in Minister Dijkgraaf's letter of April 2023?² The initiative, in broad terms, called to: (1) stop actively recruiting international students; (2) present a bill to control the influx of international students; (3) ask for clear agreements on the ratio of Dutch and international students at Dutch universities; and (4) clarify language requirements. The official UU reaction, put shortly, hastened to explain that the letter fits well with the policy of UU: internationalisation is essential to our work, but there are also concerns that we listen to. But within the community, the reactions differed.

Below, we present some of those reactions. Before we proceed, however, one word of caution. While we tried to involve as many staff members as possible through our workshops and sessions, attendance and formats varied hugely (from one-to-one conversations to workshops to small

² *Ibid.*

group discussions over three years). We do not claim to have heard all perspectives within the UU teaching community – although we did try our best! What we are presenting here is a summary of the reactions that T@UU members witnessed and intend to record for reflection and further discussions.

Our Key (Starting) Questions:

- **What even is internationalisation?**

What became clear during the course of the internationalisation-related T@UU activities (2020-2023), is: (a) that each member of the community seems to have a slightly different definition of what internationalisation is, what it entails, or what it should entail and (b) the fact that we as T@UU see questions of internationalisation as closely connected to, albeit not limited to, questions of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

What does ‘internationalisation’ mean, for our community? At the workshops, and in our one-to-one meetings, we focused with the participants on the definition of internationalisation within the UU. Broadly, (1) having many cultures under one UU roof, and (2) addressing international, cross-country, transnational and/or global issues in our education and research featured highly on the list(s) of possible definitions. The importance of having (3) multiple perspectives to discuss issues between a diverse group of people was also mentioned. In short, for the UU community ‘internationalisation’ is more than a buzzword. For some of us, it is our job – or an aspect of our job. For others, it is a part of our way of life and *Weltanschauung*.

While in many ways internationalisation is deeply engrained in higher education (and has been for a long time, in the Netherlands and elsewhere), we also noted that our participants pointed to a ‘shift’ over time between two types of ‘internationalisation’ endeavours. On the one hand, internationalisation is understood as being just about bringing in international staff/students. On the other hand, there is a more contemporary perception of internationalisation that centres on realizing the world is an international, globalizing place; that all students and staff need to know how to navigate such a world; and that such a world is reflected daily in their place of work (or study), whether they are conscious of it or not.

Many participants explained that, for them, internationalisation was connected to the experience of being exposed to different perspectives (both on personal and professional levels), and to the realization of the richness that can accompany such differences. But we also see and recognize that internationalisation is not always easy, and that it is not always seen as a richness. One of the most contested points in this regard is a very hot topic, too: the politics of language.

- **What about the hot topic of language?**

The question of language – which language to use, when, and how – remains a delicate one. Predating the Minister’s letter, the participants at our workshop highlighted this clearly, for example when asking to: (a) check during meetings what the preferred language is; (b) allow (if applicable) people to join conversations by switching language

if necessary, and (c) promote the idea and use of the *Lingua Receptiva* or [luistertaal](#), as formulated, among others, by our Utrecht colleague Prof. Jan D. ten Thije.³

While many of these points relate to the interactions among colleagues, the Minister's letter focused, understandably, on language use in educational settings. Many of our interlocutors stressed the need for clear communication about what the *language* in educational or professional settings is going to be, so that colleagues and students can be informed about what to expect. Overall, while there is no easy solution, language is a key component of any form of inclusivity, which makes a crucial difference to the possibility of feeling (un)welcome for everyone involved.

- **How to define policy success regarding internationalisation?**

Over the past couple years, the university has implemented policies to attract international staff and students. As the *Kamerbrief* highlights, the strong international dimension ensures that higher education in our country also offers a rich learning environment that broadens the field of vision of Dutch students. As a result, the Netherlands can play an important role in the global economy, tackling major social issues that transcend the Dutch national borders, such as energy, climate, and security. As participants of the workshops explained, however, there is an increasing sense that scrapping some of the recent developments will have the consequence of “destroying everything we have built” over the past few years – an astonishing turnaround that shows a reaction that seems to suggest “not being happy with success; but rather, being scared of it”.⁴ There are many positive consequences of internationalisation, and many of our members feel that this is an aspect which is often overlooked. In other words: *can we go beyond the marketization of internationalisation?* Is internationalisation just a policy to make money, by attracting more students and staff, or – as many members of our community believe – it is much more than that?

Underlying all the points above is that, when speaking to many of the members of the T@UU community (especially the teaching staff), an element that repeatedly came up is that know-how isn't evident – it is often implicit. It may be surprising for some, but our conversations show that a lot of knowledge within universities is informal tacit knowledge.⁵ An important point made by the participants concerns how we can translate and communicate the Dutch higher education system in such a way as to share some of the tacit knowledge about ‘how things work’. Socialization has an important role to play here. Members of our community shared a need for more training for teachers (both national and international) in how to create an inclusive environment, as well as more information-sharing with international colleagues and students about how the Dutch academic system *actually* works. This will help international staff and students feel more included and welcomed and not left on their own as soon as they cross cultural and national borders, and it might help Dutch colleagues to look at the UU system with different eyes. While we recognize that the University has made key progress in this regard, we recommend that it continues on this important path. In our view, it's key to find ways to include this informal knowledge.

³ For a broad overview see, *Lingua Receptiva*: Available at <https://www.luistertaal.nl/en/> [Last accessed: 19 February 2024].

⁴ Anonymized quote from a small group meeting held on 25 April 2023.

⁵ As pointed out, this is a relevant point also – for example – when discussing first generation students and staff. C. Hataya, ‘How to Champion First Generation Students at University’. Available at: <https://www.uu.nl/en/opinion/how-to-champion-first-generation-students-at-university> [Last accessed: 22 February 2024].

Our TIPS for Success:

1. Consider Integrating the Question of Internationalisation in Inclusion, Equality, and Diversity Efforts:

- Recognize the interconnected nature of inclusion, equality, and diversity with internationalisation initiatives. Foster collaboration between teams working on these issues to leverage synergies and address common challenges.
- Establish regular forums or working groups that bring together stakeholders from different areas to discuss and share insights on inclusive practices, ensuring that the perspectives of international and domestic communities are considered.
- Emphasize the value of diversity and inclusion in the university's identity, reinforcing that these principles are integral to what makes the institution proud.

2. Enhance Language Inclusivity – both in education environments and within collegial and professional settings:

- Implement a flexible language policy that fosters inclusivity by involving participants in the decision-making process regarding the language of meetings – if possible. Consider the concept of *Lingua Receptiva* or 'luistertaal' proposed by Emmy Gulikers, Mieke Smit, and Jan Ten Thije, ensuring that it is effectively integrated into communication practices.
- Where applicable, promote proactive communication by informing participants in advance about the language in which a meeting or activity will be conducted, providing them with the opportunity to prepare.
- Conduct training sessions or workshops on effective communication strategies in multilingual environments, encouraging a culture of respect for diverse linguistic backgrounds. Recognize that all colleagues, but especially those in leading positions, have a big role in setting a constructive example.

3. Sustain a Culture of (Inter)national Pride and Awareness:

- Regularly celebrate and showcase achievements related to internationalisation, inclusion, equality, and diversity – and the synergies between these domains – to instill a sense of pride among the university community, which can make its way into the classroom.
- Continue, and further develop awareness campaigns that highlight the university's commitment to these values, emphasizing the positive impact they have on the academic environment.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of policies and initiatives in the areas of language, inclusion, equality, diversity, and internationalisation.

Authors and contributors:

This report is signed by Lorena De Vita and Femke van de Glind, but it received the support of many members of the T@UU community. Its findings have been shared, and discussed, with T@UU Council Members Adrien Melquiond, Sanne Frequin, Marij Swinkels, Bruce Mutsaviro, and former members Stef Dingemans and Leonie Kroes-Wichers. Irina Marin, Julie Fraser and Özge Bilgili contributed crucial feedback during the final phases of the project. Conversations between Lorena and the other members of the 'Internationalisation 2.0 project' Advisory Board at the UU Department of History and Art History, namely David Onnekink, Jochen Hung, Sarah Carmichael, Beau Visser, Dax Antheunisse, and Chiara Evans, were indirectly also very important for this project. The many participants to the session: *How do you see me? International Lecturers and the (G)local University*, co-led (online) with Sanne Frequin on 29 June 2021 in the context of the VJOW provided important input to the project at an early stage, as did the participants in the small group conversations held in 2023, including *The TIP Project: The Internationalisation Project* on 2 May 2023, co-led (in person) by Lorena De Vita and Femke van de Glind. This report was preliminarily presented and discussed at the CAT-Board meeting of 18 December 2023.