



## **Internationalization for Associations**

This document is set up with the purpose of assisting associations in their process of internationalization and to assist in increasing their accessibility to both national- and international students. In this regard associations should strive towards the final goal that there is no differentiation between national- and international students anymore.

### **International students**

International students are harder to attract to the association compared to national students. This stems from the fact that international students are often unfamiliar with the concept of a study association. The association is often “a Dutch thing” and international students are often very focused on their study. They can therefore see study associations as a burden rather than something useful.

#### **Concept**

Since the Netherlands has a rather unique system with different associations, it is of vital importance to enlighten the concept of a study association to international students. Therefore, it is important to clearly explain the concept and to emphasize the added value, both the social- and study aspects that study associations can offer. Additionally, international students value the opinion of professors a lot. It could be helpful to get the support of the department in your process of internationalization, through i.e. the tutor-mentor system, assistance with- and promotion of activities, written statements or open nights and advice regarding the involvement of international students.

#### **Student/Study Association**

International students often confuse the concept of a study association with the concept of a student association. This stems from the fact that this concept is rather unknown outside of the Netherlands, since they often work with college unions and different interest clubs. International students therefore tend to associate study associations with drinking, partying and no openness to international students. Due to the unknown difference in terms as used in the Netherlands, internationals may feel that your study associations is also involved in such affairs only. In this case it could be helpful to work on your image as a study association towards international students.

#### **Priorities and preferences**

International students studying in the Netherlands sometimes have different priorities and preferences compared to Dutch students. There are certain reasons for this, i.e. their commitment to go abroad for a particular program, differing levels of financial investment and possibly the difference in age between national and international students. Consequently, international students are usually determined to their studies and might wish to focus on their study alone, without involvement in other areas. Additionally, international students tend to “stick together” with other international students, which has a negative influence on integration within the association. Therefore, to increase the number of (active) internationals in the association, it is vital to clearly



explain the concept and show the added value as well as what the association can do for your study and career. However, do not lose the social aspect out of sight, since this attracts many international students as well. Ideally as an association you are able to offer every facet that you are able to offer to a Dutch student to an international student as well.

Advice: First of all we recognize that internationalization is not a one size fits all concept but must be tailor made for every association and its own characteristics and complications. Concepts and tips in this document must be used in an appropriate way for each specific association and in such a way that it helps accomplish the association's set goal regarding internationalization.

Advice: Social activities are most useful to gather, attract and bind as many national- and international students as possible. Regularly, there is a spill-over effect from social- to study-related events, rather than the other way around. However this depends on the kind of student population. During the introduction period it's very important to state the concept of a study association and a tip might be to get involved in correspondence from the university/faculty/study department itself towards the student. The more an international student has the feeling that the study association is really connected with the study and integrated in the common student life, the more easily they will give the association a chance.

## Information

The first step to internationalization is to explore the stance and opinion of current and new members towards the idea of the process of internationalizing a study association. How your association can get insights from international students depends on the structure of the association. Some ideas are: International Committee, International Think Tank, International Ambassador, knowledge from within the university and a member survey aimed at both internationals and Dutch students. Some potential areas on which your research could be focused:

### 1. Promotion / Presentation

- a. Current "image" of the association among both national- and international students
- b. How can the association promote/present itself to both national- and international students? It may be that the presentation of the association towards internationals needs to be different, or take into account how internationals feel about associations.
- c. What may be the best course of actions for the association?
- d. How to get involved in university correspondence?

### 2. Members

- a. How do your current members feel about the process of internationalization? This information can be gathered through i.e. surveys, reports, interviews and GA's/GMM's. This is very important as they are the ones who control the GA/GMM.



- b. Is there anything that internationals want that differs from what Dutch students want (priorities)?
- c. The different needs of both categories of members (preference)?

### **3. Process of Internationalization**

- a. Recommend a course of action on how to internationalize, or deal with an International at the University of Groningen.
- b. Find out what obstacles exist and how can they be overcome/dealt with.

### **4. Events**

- a. What might be the best way to involve all students?
- b. What stages should be taken to internationalize the association?
- c. Are there any events that are not compatible for both international and Dutch students?
- d. Is it feasible to organize all existing activities in English/accessible to international students as well? (think about for instance a pool of speakers/businesses you normally approach that cannot comply with the international requirements)

### **5. Organs**

- a. Which organs of the association can be converted quickly to operate in English?
- b. Which organs may have difficulty going international both straight away and in the future (i.e. Corporate relations, the candidate board, etc.)?

### **6. Committees**

- a. Make a list of what committees/functions are suitable for internationals. This might mean that you have to rearrange some committees/functions to make the association more accessible to international students.

### **7. External parties**

- a. How will external parties view the implications you make with regard to having internationality embedded in your association? (think about partners, sister-association you share common activities with, SVO's/CFO dealing with internationals in board positions)

Advice: do not be afraid to experiment. International students are able to perform almost every function, except for acquisition. Moreover, it would be advisable to complete this part by a survey as well. Send out an email with a list of questions and areas to comment on, in order to see how the current members and new members feel about the above. This could possibly happen in cooperation with the department. Do not forget that they benefit from internationalization of the association as well.

## **Plan**

The outcome of the research on the needs amongst members serves as a guideline and gives the board an actual impression of the real opinions of its members about the process of internationalization. Moreover, it proves to be vital when presenting initiatives or an



internationalization plan to the GA/GMM. The report serves as an important base for your internationalization plan.

The plan must be both concrete (as in that is possible to complete), as well as flexible (as in that additional time can be given to some areas, if needed). No matter which method is invoked, it is important that a schedule is set. This also should include reflection and evaluation time within the board, on the GA/GMM and within the association (possibly through a survey), to ensure that the association is on the right path.

## Starting

Certain aspects of the process of internationalization can be started even before a report of the above mentioned is completed. However, including them in the plan is recommendable. The following aspects might and can be executed before a concrete multiple stage plan has been set up:

1. **Documents:** Ensuring that the most important documents, such as the statutes and the internal regulations, are available both in Dutch and in English. The RUG is offering free official translations via the faculties. Talk to your faculty for further information.
2. **Emails:** Provide members with English emails, i.e. newsletters and information.
3. **Facebook:** Provide followers with post solely in English or English first if you choose for a bilingual approach.
4. **Dutch support committee:** This committee provides support and assistance to international students, i.e. assistance with translating Dutch documents and possibly provide short language courses (for more information contact study association Nexus). As a study association you can set up a Dutch support committee for your international students and for instance teach the Dutch culture to new students. However one should be careful to not give the internationals the idea of assimilation taking place

Advice: Realise, all promotion and communication to members has an effect on the international image of your association and this should be realised while communicating. Take as example integration committee it can be used as a useful tool to momentarily attract international students. However it should be taken in account that differentiating between Dutch and International members could obstruct the internationalization process and the inclusion of international students as they are still treated as a separate group.

## Draft Plan

Provided below is a draft plan for the process of internationalization of an association. This reflects a general plan, which still has to be tailored to the specific needs and situation of each individual association.



## Stage One

### Investigating Committee into Internationalization

- As stated above, this “internationalization committee” (or however you wish to name it) is there to investigate how the association feels about the process of internationalization. This report is important, since it serves as a solid base for the internationalization plan.

### Translation of key documents

- Statutes and Internal Regulations
  - Statutes
    - Since the statutes provide the legal basis of the association, it is of vital importance to have a professional translation available for international students. However, keep in mind that this translation will never have legal power in the case of conflict with the Dutch version of the statutes.
    - It is advised to get a certified copy, as this is the most important document used by the association.
    - This does not mean that it cannot be used in day-to-day operations later on. The Dutch law only allows Dutch statutes.
  - Internal Regulations:
    - Since the internal regulations consist of the more concrete rules of the association, it is important that these are available to every members of the association as well. The translation may become binding, if so voted on by the GA/GMM, with full regard to the relevant regulations and steps needed for internal regulations to take effect.
    - At this stage it is advised to simply have an English translation without binding force.

### Promotion and emails

- Providing all emails bilingually. At this point it would be unwise to assume that members would wish to have English emails only. In most cases this step can take place without notifying- or asking permission to the GA/GMM. To enhance inclusion, it might be the best idea to put the English text before the Dutch.
- Ensure that promotion goes in English. For Dutch events, make it very clear that it is “Dutch speaking only”.

Advise: Try to transfer all events, communication and promotion to English as soon as you can, to avoid exclusion of international students.

### Dutch Support Committee

- This committee has the main purpose of supporting and assisting international students, i.e. assistance with translating important Dutch documents or providing short Dutch language courses to international students.



## Stage Two

### English-spoken events

- Organising events in English (English-spoken events), as well as promoting them as such. Consider when promotion will be completely in English or bilingual. It might be that your first English-spoken event(s) may not have the desired result/turnout that you expected with regard to both national- and international students attending. However, do not let this discourage you. Such big changes take time and students need to get used to this.
- Good promotion is essential in this regard, as well as being available to talk to in English. If internationals have a good time, most of them will normally return for more events in the future, and might even inform others.

Advice: Start with organising just a few English-spoken events and slowly expand this number. Be clear in the promotion. Members that are used to a (fully) Dutch association may have some trouble with the internationalization. Do not let this discourage you, the whole process takes time and eventually everyone will be used to it.

### Bilingual or English-only website

- Not all associations may wish to have their website in English only. This, of course, is not an issue. However, it is important to provide the website both in Dutch and English. Some associations have a bilingual website and might be able to assist. This way the information can be given clearly in both Dutch and English.
- The way to have a bilingual website can either be the two languages at the same time, with English first, or by having a switch-to-Dutch tab.

### Internationalization of committees

- This step requires to change the names of the committees to English names. Attention must be paid to the Internal Regulations, which consequently have to be changed. In this way internationals will be able to better understand what the committee does. Moreover, it allows an international student to be able to join a committee next year.
- Publish the list of what positions within what committees are open to international students. Some tasks of committees are not doable for international students (think of acquisition for a career focused event where Dutch companies have to be approached). Regarding this topic it's very important to deliver tailor made solutions and sometimes shift some duties and tasks per position in order to optimise the fit.

### English in the GMA

- Allow internationals the opportunity to speak English at a GMA/GMM. It is not necessary to organize the GMA/GMM in English at this moment, but allow it to be spoken if an international student is present. Make sure to prepare your GMA in English to ease the switch when



necessary. In this way an association will allow internationals the opportunity to partake within the association, as well as not forcing both English and Dutch students too early in the internationalization process.

- It is important to ensure that members are informed about this.

## Stage Three

### All events and promotion in English

- As the international community at the University of Groningen rises, more members might be international. Make sure that your promotion is in English fully, and that the events are accessible for international students.

### Allowing an International to apply for a committee

- It should be possible for international students to partake in committees. There are always other committee members who are able to help, if assistance is needed.
- There should be no restriction on the fact that the international student is not able to speak Dutch, unless this is fundamental to the committee's operations (i.e. corporate relations). Instead, each applicant should be judged on whether or not they are qualified to fulfil the required workload.
- It should be noted that some associations have all committees open to international students, including the committee that deals with corporate relations and external affairs. Therefore, it is possible to do this as well but this, of course, depends on each association. However, the more committees have an international student, the faster the notion of being an international association spreads.



### **Stage Four Allowing internationals to apply for a Chairman position**

- This step is an addition to the step in stage three. If a committee is operating well it should be noted that it may be possible to allow an international to chair one of the committees. This, of course, needs to be considered by the board whether this plan is wise and will work well. The progress from this step can be huge, as internationals see opportunities and some might also be more motivated to join as a committee functionary.

### **Having the Internal Regulation binding in English**

- Make the Internal Regulations binding in English. This step requires the consent of your GMA/GMM. As noted above, it is not possible to have an association's statutes binding in English. However, this does not restrict allowing the Internal Regulations from being binding in English.
- It may not be necessary to have a binding English Regulation, but only a translation.

### **Organizing the GMA/GMM in English**

- Having the GMA/GMM in English will be a major step for each association. There is a chance that the association may not be ready for this, but it is always a good idea to check among the members. If this step is to be taken, it is important that the GMA/GMM is informed, in detail, about how the association has gone international, as well as the reason for turning the GMA/GMM into English.

## **Stage Five**

### **Allowing internationals to apply for board positions.**

- It is important that the other board members support the international board member. Moreover, it is required to have the board meetings in English and keep a record of such meetings in English as well. This also means that the language spoken at the office must be in English 99% of the time, language exclusion is one of the biggest factors influencing the degree of feeling included (this even applies if you are speaking Dutch to a person in the room while an international is present, this might feel a bit weird at times though).

## **Stage Six**

- In the end there should be no difference when it comes to international and Dutch students, and in the end they will both be members alike. Therefore, some support committees of any kind that were used to include international students, should in the end be discharged. However, for instance an international information night can prove to be quite useful.





## Additional

The ideas listed here are additional ideas that an association can use that might help in the process of internationalization. This can be taken as either additional steps, or as supplements for the above mentioned.

### International Representative

- An international student representative can provide more insights into what the internationals wish from the association, or if they are having any trouble.

### Board minutes in English

- Keep a record of board meetings in English. It may be useful to have at least an English copy of the minutes, so that future boards may have the opportunity to review past records if they happen to be international.

### General Members Meeting minutes in English

- Minutes of the General Members Meeting should be available in English in order to provide all members of the association with the information about the association.

## Some ideas for activities and internationals inclusion

These are some activities which can be used to increase inclusion among internationals in your study association:

- Ibn Battuta: organize a barbecue in September for both international and Dutch students. This is being endorsed by our faculty, attracts both groups equally much and helps our association with inclusion.
- EBF: organize your Introduction Weekend in another weekend than the ESN Camp. More international students will join. Organise a running diner by several restaurants with kitchens from all over the world. Dutch and international students really mix up in this activity.
- JFV: organize a specific event where you connect international students to Dutch students. For example, a party where you would have couples of students made that consist of both international and Dutch students. These couples then stay together and attend other students/couples and activities during the event together.
- NUTS: implement a 'buddy' program within a study association. Here, you assign an international or Dutch 'buddy' to a Dutch or international group of students respectively. This will help students to overcome language barriers in time and mixes both the international and Dutch students within an association well. In case not enough 'buddies' can be found, both board members and active members can set a good example by volunteering to be a 'buddy', therefore making other members more enthusiastic to become a 'buddy'.



### General Tips

- Be aware that only the opportunity to speak English is not enough to have present yourself as an international association. If speaking English is not the standard, you project yourself as a Dutch association which is only tolerant but in its core still a Dutch association. Thereby you exclude international students.
- Use a lot of member input when you enter later stadia of the internationalization process. Member surveys are proven to be very enlightening and represent the actual needs of members and make sure a bottom up approach is used.
- How far should you go with internationalization depends on the needs of the target group you as association represents and what the target group will be in the future (you are an association of the the students in your studies, if 40% of all students is international, you should adapt the degree of internationalization to that - otherwise you will miss out on a lot of potential members)
- Each association operates in a different environment with different stakeholders so every plan to internationalize the association should be adapted to the certain needs of the situation.
- Do not forget that internationalization starts with a board and pool of active members that are open and enthusiastic towards international students. Involve them to participate also in your social events. In this way a warm feeling towards the association is established.
- Doing everything in English isn't the same as creating a feeling of inclusion - always differentiate between theses two. Obviously, the English language requirement is an essential part that influences inclusion.
- Other associations might be fighting the same problems your association is encountering, try to ask for help externally and broaden your horizon.