

Incoming degree mobility

in Dutch higher education 2023-24

28 May 2024



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Key findings

In this annual report, we present data from 2023–24 on international degree students in the Netherlands, also known as **incoming degree mobility**. Click on the arrows below to read more out about each key finding.

Slowest growth in international student population in 9 years >

+5% 

more international degree students are enrolled in Dutch higher education compared to last year, bringing the total to 128K.

At research universities, new international bachelor enrolments plateau for the first time >



20.6 K new international students enrolled on research university bachelor programmes, the same number as in 2022-23.



Engineering at universities of applied sciences is the fastest-growing field of study for the second consecutive year >

8.3 K

international students enrolled on UAS Engineering programmes, 13% more than last year.



44%

of all international degree students study in 2 provinces: North and South Holland

Not all international bachelor students at research universities choose to study in English: >

2.2K

are enrolled on a Dutch-taught programme.

hallo

hello

Number of new students from Ukraine continues to grow >

+18%

After doubling in 2022–23, new enrolments from Ukraine increased again but at a slower rate.





Introduction

Each year, around 6 million higher education students from across the globe seek a bachelor's or master's degree in a country other than their own. This number has more than doubled since records began in 2006 and is expected to continue growing in the coming years. According to the latest available data, the Netherlands is the 12th most popular study destination worldwide for international degree-seeking students, and ranks 4th in Europe after the United Kingdom, Germany and France ([UNESCO, 2023](#); [Nuffic, 2024](#)).

In this annual report, we present the latest facts and figures on international students who come to the Netherlands to pursue a bachelor's or master's degree, also known as **incoming degree mobility**. Our analysis is based on national register data from the Education Executive Agency (in Dutch: *Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (DUO)*), and covers the academic years 2006-07 to 2023-24.

Definitions

The scope of this report encompasses international students and, for comparison, Dutch students, who are enrolled in full degree programmes at publicly-financed higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Netherlands. Due to a lack of data, we do not

include international degree students enrolled at privately-financed Dutch higher education institutions, of which there were 2,859 in 2022.¹

International students who come to the Netherlands for part of their study programme or an internship (known as **credit mobility**) are also outside the scope of this report. For the most recent available data on credit mobility within the Erasmus+ programme, please refer to our dashboard on [Erasmus+ higher education student mobility](#).

The Dutch government classifies a student as international if they obtained their secondary education diploma (ISCED 3) outside of the Netherlands *and* do not hold Dutch citizenship. Dutch citizens who completed their secondary education abroad (also known as **homecoming students**) are therefore not considered international degree students ([Ministry of Finance, 2019](#)). This group is more likely to speak Dutch, more likely to have a social network in the Netherlands, and qualifies for the same benefits as Dutch students graduating from the Dutch secondary school system. There were 16,792 homecoming students enrolled in higher education in the Netherlands in the academic year 2023-24.

¹ Information obtained from DUO in April 2024.



Current developments

Throughout the report we discuss a range of developments in the Dutch political, economic and policy sphere relevant to incoming degree mobility:

- Internationalisation in Balance bill
- Self-direction for higher education institutions
- Reintroduction of the basic student grant
- Status of Ukrainian refugees

New this year

We are now able to map the regional distribution of international students with more accuracy than in previous years, using the specific site of the institution where a student is enrolled rather than the institution's official main address (see [Regional differences](#)). In addition, the chapter [Language of instruction](#) now includes an analysis of the language choices of both Dutch and international students at research universities since 2016-17.

Explore the data online

The text and figures in this report provide a detailed analysis of trends and developments in incoming degree mobility up to and including the academic year 2023-24. We offer additional information online, for example, about specific countries of origin and fields of study. Explore this and more in our interactive dashboards at www.nuffic.nl/facts-and-figures.

Note that some of the statistics in this publication may differ slightly from those reported in previous editions or online. This is because DUO makes small corrections to the existing student register data every time new data is published.

1. Total numbers and yearly growth rates



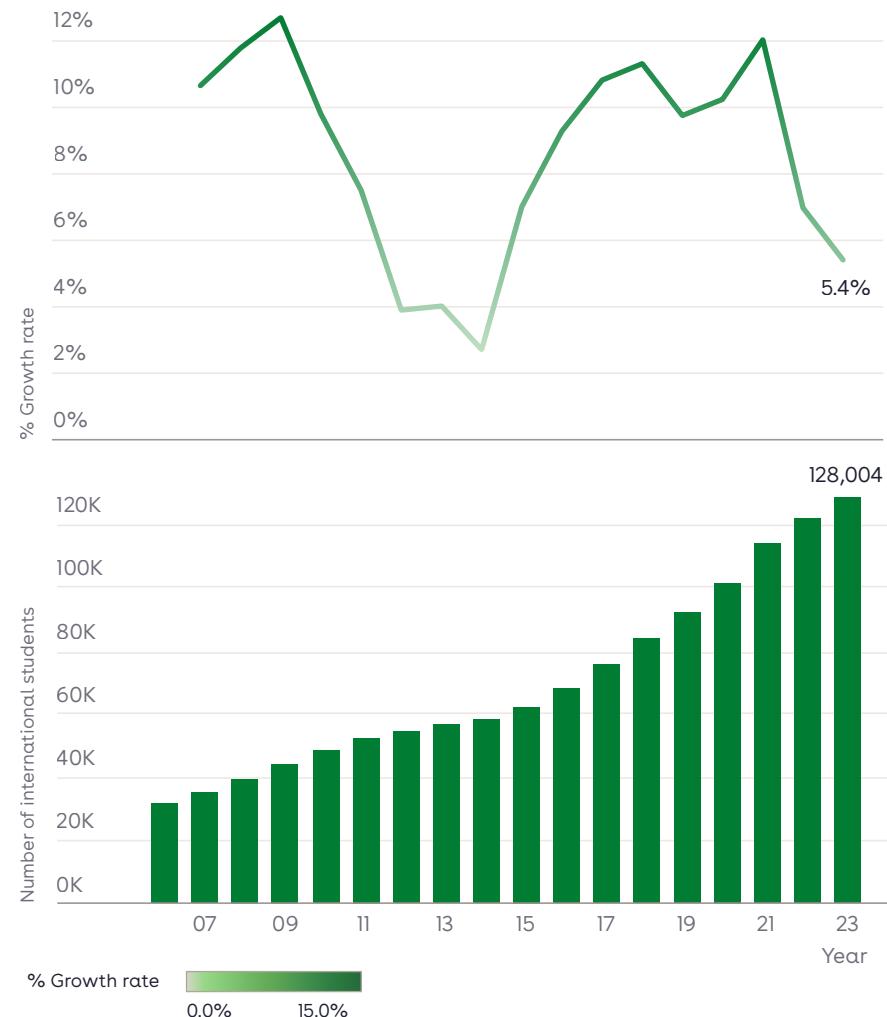


Number of international degree students still growing but at slowest rate in 9 years

In the academic year 2023-24, 128,004 international students were enrolled for a full degree programme at publicly-financed higher education institutions in the Netherlands. Compared to 2022-23, there were 6,613 more international degree students, equivalent to an increase of 5.4%. This is the slowest annual growth in the international student population since 2014-15 (see Figure 1).

16% of all students in Dutch higher education were international in 2023-24, up from 14.8% the previous academic year.

Figure 1. Trends in growth rate and total number of international degree students (2006-07 to 2022-23)





University of applied sciences (UAS)

Higher professional education and applied research with a strong orientation towards professional practice.

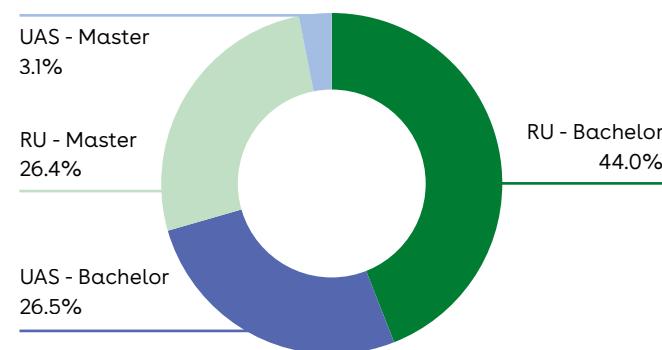
Research university (RU)

Higher education institutions responsible for offering research oriented programmes in an academic setting.

Largest share of international degree students enrolled on research university bachelor's programmes

In total, there were 90,135 international degree students enrolled at research universities (RU) in the academic year 2023-24. This was more than twice as many as at universities of applied sciences (UAS; 37,869). The degree type with the largest number of international students in the Netherlands was the research university bachelor. In 2023-24, 44% of all international degree students were enrolled on an RU bachelor's programme (see Figure 2), up from 42.7% the previous academic year. An equal proportion of international students were enrolled in RU master's (26.4%) and UAS bachelor's (26.5%) programmes. The degree type with the smallest share of international degree students was the university of applied sciences master's with 3.1%.

Figure 2. Proportion of total international degree student population by type of institution and degree (2023-24)



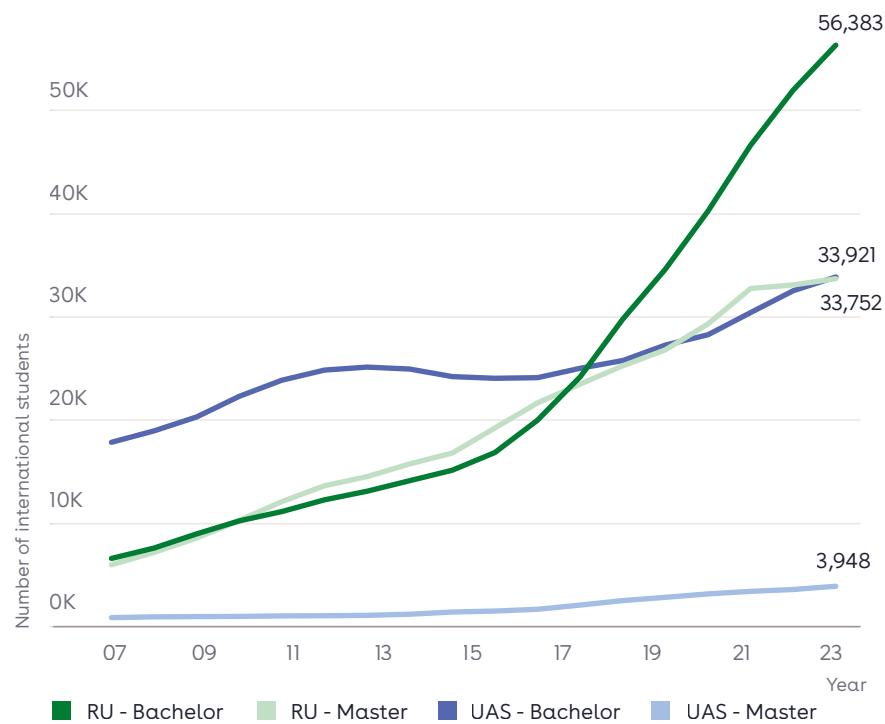
Total number of international bachelor's students at research universities still growing

RU bachelor's programmes showed the largest absolute increase compared to last academic year, with 4,356 additional international degree students. Since 2018-19, it is the degree type with the largest number of international degree students (see Figure 3). In the previous academic year, the RU master was more popular among international degree students than the UAS bachelor, but in 2023-24 they are almost equal in number.



The UAS Master's still has the fewest international degree students, but showed the fastest relative growth in 2023-24, with 8.7% more international students enrolled than in the previous year.

Figure 3. Number of enrolled international students by type of institution and type of degree (2006-07 to 2023-24)



More than a quarter of the student population at research universities is international

At research universities, a larger share of the total degree student population is international than at universities of applied sciences (26.4% compared to 8.2%). The difference in shares between bachelor's and master's programmes at research universities is small: 27.6% of all RU master's students are international, compared to 25.7% of all RU bachelor's students. At universities of applied sciences there is a larger difference in composition between bachelor's and master's programmes. 26.5% of all UAS master's students are international, while 7.6% of all UAS bachelors are international.

Current development 1: Internationalisation in Balance Bill

At the end of July 2023, outgoing Minister Dijkgraaf published the [Internationalisation in Balance bill](#) (in Dutch: *Wet Internationalisering in balans* (WIB)). The purpose of the WIB is to ensure a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of internationalisation in higher education. The bill includes sharpening the accreditation of foreign-language study programmes and measures to improve Dutch language proficiency among all students. It also allows universities of applied sciences and research universities to limit the number of students admitted to the English-language variant of a study programme. The Senate (in Dutch: *Eerste kamer*) and House of Representatives (*Tweede kamer*) still need to consider this bill.



2. New enrolments





What are new enrolments?

By 'new enrolments' we mean degree students enrolling on a given study programme for the first time (as opposed to those re-registering for a given programme). An alternative definition (used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), for example) considers only those enrolling for the first time at a Dutch research university or university of applied sciences as 'new enrolments'. According to this definition, almost all 'new enrolments' on master's programmes are international. This is because Dutch master's students have typically already completed a bachelor's degree at either research university or university of applied sciences in the Netherlands. Only those who have not previously completed a bachelor's degree in the Netherlands are counted as 'new enrolments'. As a result, the percentage of all 'new enrolments' that is international appears disproportionately high. In this report we consider both Dutch and international students enrolling on a given master's (or bachelor's) programme for the first time as 'new enrolments'.

Modest increase in new Dutch enrolments

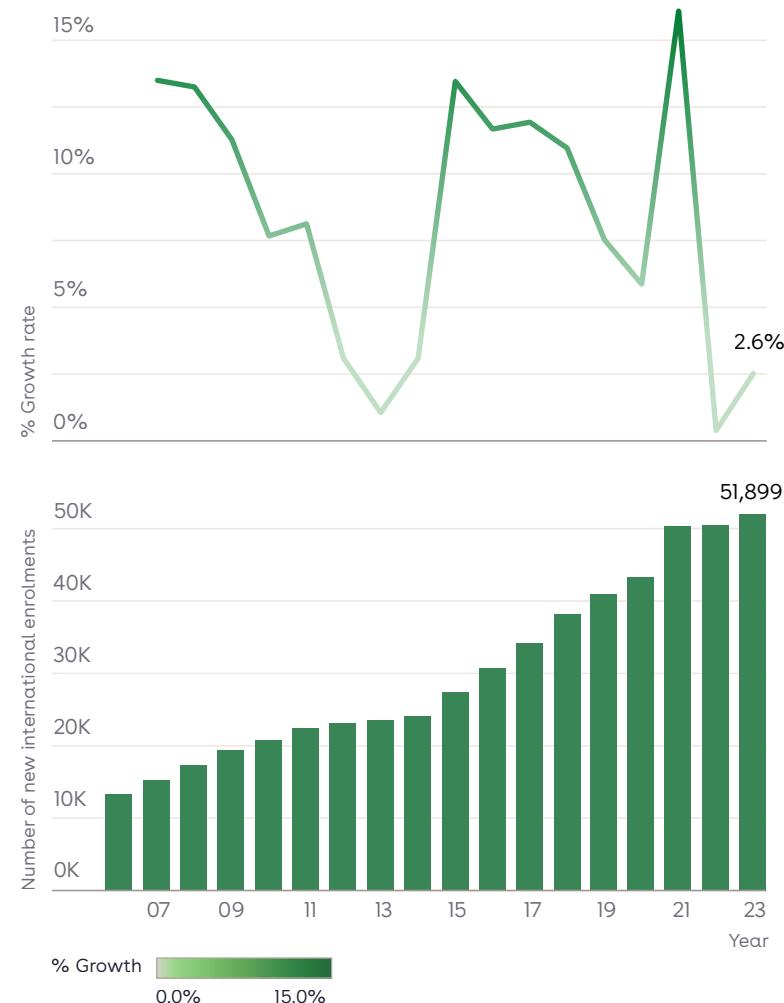
Some 217,161 new Dutch students enrolled in higher education in 2023-24, 0.8% more than the year before (+1,723 students). This follows a period of decline in 2021-22 and 2022-23, when new enrolments fell by an average of 6.9% per year, possibly as a result of Dutch students delaying their enrolment until the reintroduction of the basic student grant in the academic year 2023-24 (see [Current Development 3](#)). However, the modest uptick of less than 1% in 2023-24 indicates that the return of the basic grant has not yet had a notable effect on the number of new Dutch students enrolling in higher education. New Dutch enrolments were up slightly across all degree types except for the research university bachelor (-334, -0.6%).

Year-on-year growth in new international enrolments remains slow

Dutch higher education institutions received 51,899 new enrolments from international students for the academic year 2023-24 (see Figure 4). This is 1,298 more than the previous year, an increase of 2.6%. New international enrolments are therefore on the rise again, following a year in which there was almost no growth (+0.4% in 2022-23). Nonetheless, the current growth rate of 2.6% is considerably slower than in the preceding 6-year period (2015-16 to 2021-22), when the number of new international enrolments increased between 6% and 16% each year.



Figure 4. Yearly growth rate and total number of new international enrolments (2006-07 to 2023-24)



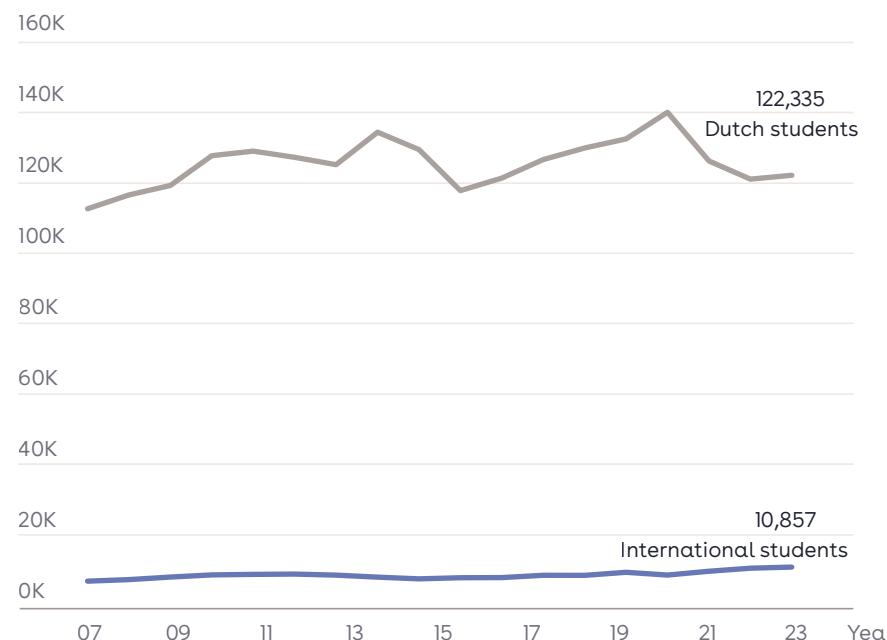
Rise in new international enrolments at universities of applied sciences, especially at master's level

Universities of applied sciences saw an overall increase in new international enrolments relative to the previous year (13,042, +649). As shown in Figure 5, both UAS bachelor's (10,857, +324) and master's programmes (2,185 +325) received more new international enrolments in 2023-24, with the most notable uptick at master's level.

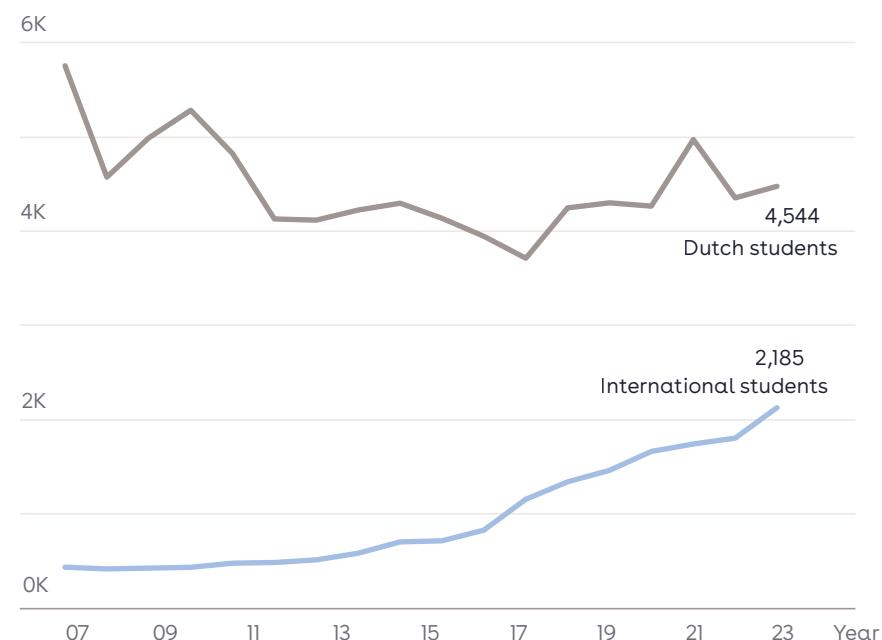


Figure 5. Number of new Dutch and international degree student enrolments per year for universities of applied sciences by type of degree (2006-07 to 2023-24)

UAS Bachelor New Enrolments



UAS Master New Enrolments



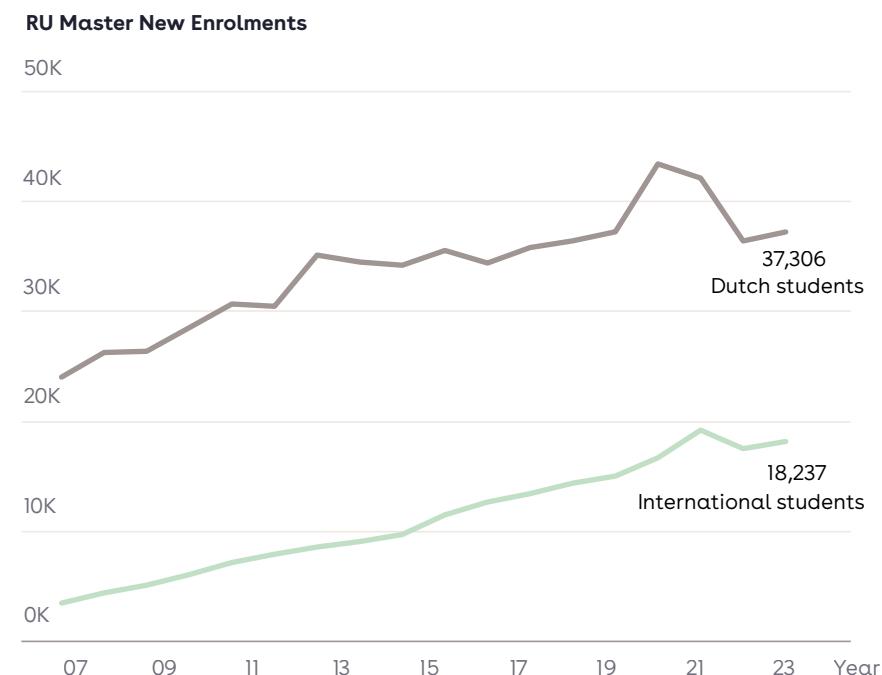
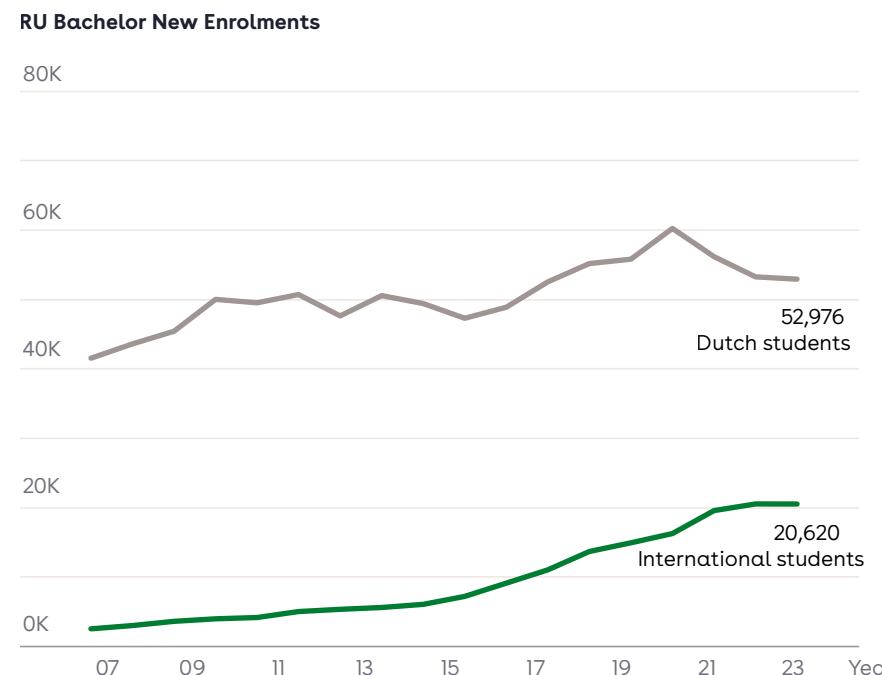


At research universities, new international bachelor's enrolments plateau for the first time

New international enrolments on research university bachelor's programmes were down slightly on the previous year (20,620, -10), ending almost two decades of continuous growth

(see Figure 6). Meanwhile, RU master's programmes received more new international students than the year before (18,237, +659), resulting in a net increase in new international enrolments at research universities.

Figure 6. Number of new Dutch and international degree student enrolments per year for research universities by type of degree (2006-07 to 2023-24)





Relative share of new enrolments from abroad remained stable

Of all new degree student enrolments in the academic year 2023-24, almost 1 in 5 (19.3%) was international. A larger share of the new enrolments was international at research universities (30.1%) than at universities of applied sciences (9.3%). At research universities, 32.8% of the new master's students was international, and 28% of the new bachelor's students. At universities of applied sciences the disparity was larger, with 32.5% of the new master's students coming from abroad, compared to 8.2% of the new bachelor's students. The UAS master's was also the degree type with the largest increase in the share of new enrolments that was international (up from 29.6% in 2022-23).

Current development 2: Self-direction for higher education institutions

At the request of outgoing Minister Dijkgraaf, umbrella organisations Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) and the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) have both made proposals for self-direction with the aim of increasing Dutch language proficiency in higher education and achieving a more balanced intake of international students. According to outgoing Minister Dijkgraaf, these proposals are in anticipation of and complementary to the Internationalisation in Balance bill (see Current Development 1).

With the request for self-direction, higher education institutions are asked to take greater account of the social effects of offering English-language education and the intake of international students. Both self-direction proposals include measures to improve Dutch language proficiency amongst staff and students, review the foreign-language education offer, better regulate the intake of international students, and increase their chance of staying in the Netherlands after graduating. Both unive

rsities of applied sciences and research universities are also addressing accommodation issues among their students. For further information, see the proposals published by VH and UNL.

How the bill under consideration and the self-direction proposals from UNL and VH will affect incoming degree mobility remains to be seen.

The self-direction proposals include measures to better regulate the intake of international students and increase their chance of staying in the Netherlands after graduating.



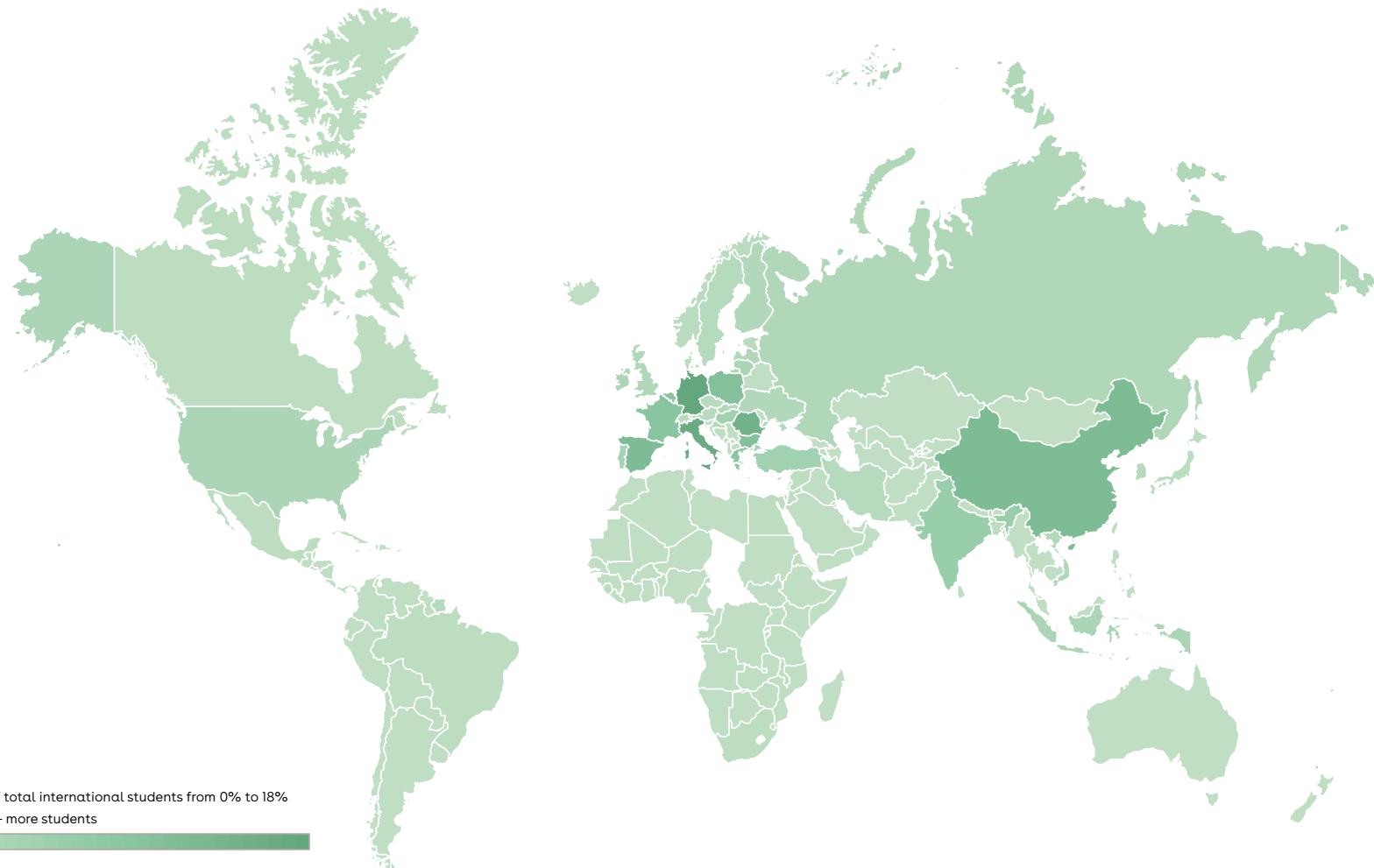
3. Countries of origin

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Figure 7. Countries of origin of international degree students in Dutch higher education in 2023-24



Note: Students with an unknown country of origin are excluded from this figure (N=192). This also applies to Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10.



3.1 Differences between EEA and non-EEA countries

Non-EEA student population grows nearly twice as fast as EEA student population

In the academic year 2023-24, international students pursuing a degree in the Netherlands originated from 167 countries (see Figure 7). There were 92,216 students from within the European Economic Area (EEA) in 2023-24, comprising 72.1% of the total international degree student population (see Figure 8). This is similar to the percentage of EEA students in 2022-23 (72.8%). The total number of EEA students grew by 4.5% in 2023-24 (+3,972), a slower rate than in 2022-23 (+6.5%).

Bachelor's and master's students from outside the EEA totalled 35,596, accounting for 27.9% of all international degree students in 2023-24. Compared to the previous year, there were 8% more non-EEA students (+2,624), the same growth rate as observed in 2022-23. This means that in 2023-24, the number of students from outside the EEA grew nearly twice as fast as the EEA student population.



European Economic Area (EEA)

The EEA comprises all 27 countries in the European Union (EU), plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. This group no longer includes the United Kingdom.

Figure 8. Percentage of international degree students from within and outside the European Economic Area (EEA)



Share of non-EEA students relatively higher in masters' programmes, especially at universities of applied sciences

Compared to their fellow students from EEA countries, students from outside the EEA were relatively more likely to pursue a master's degree in the Netherlands rather than a bachelor's degree. Among international students enrolled on master's programmes at research universities and universities of applied sciences, over one-third were from outside the EEA (see Figure 9). On bachelor's programmes the share of non-EEA students was lower, at around a quarter.

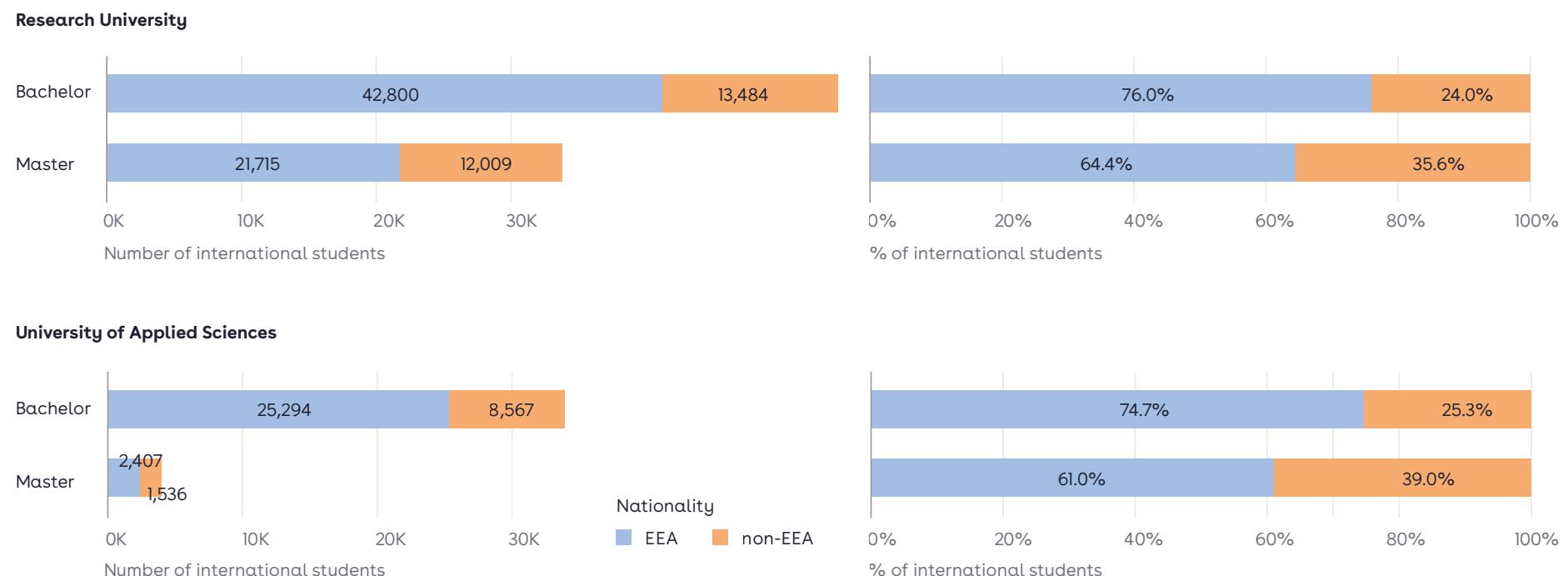


The relative share of students from outside the EEA increased at universities of applied sciences in 2023-24 compared to the previous academic year, particularly at master's level. Of all international students enrolled on a UAS master's programme, 39% came from outside the EEA (up from 36.3% in 2022-23).

The share of non-EEA students on UAS bachelor's programmes

was 25.3% (up from 23.8%). There was also an increase in the relative share of non-EEA students at research universities, though to a lesser extent and at master's level only. 35.6% of all international degree students on RU master's programmes came from outside the EEA in 2023-24 (up from 34.7% in 2022-23).

Figure 9. International degree students in the Netherlands by institution type, degree, and nationality (EEA or non-EEA) in 2023-24 (in total numbers and in percentages)





No increase in new enrolments from within the EEA

Figure 10 shows fluctuating growth in the number of new enrolments from countries within and outside the EEA over the past decade. While the last two years have seen a fairly steady increase in the number of newly-enrolled students from outside the EEA, new enrolments from within the EEA fell by 1.9% in 2022-23 and this year remained at that same level. Nevertheless, the absolute number of newly-enrolled EEA students (35,650) was more than double that of newly-enrolled non-EEA students (16,167) in 2023-24. Enrolments from within the EEA accounted for more than two-thirds of all new international students in 2023-24 (68.8%).

Figure 10. Year-on-year growth and total numbers of newly-enrolled international students from EEA and non-EEA countries (2013-14 to 2023-24)



Note: UK is considered as a non-EEA country, also retrospectively (i.e., for years before Brexit).



Current development 3: Reintroduction of basic student grant

In the academic year 2023-24, the basic student grant was reintroduced. However, the announcement of this decision came after the application deadline for most international students. It remains to be seen whether the reintroduction of the grant will affect the number of students from the EEA coming to study in the Netherlands in the future.

Previously, students could take out a government loan to pay for living expenses. In the academic year 2023-24, however, those entitled to a basic grant received €274.90 per month and an additional €164.30 to reflect the increased cost of living. EEA and UK students may be entitled to a basic grant on two grounds. The first is if they have lived in the Netherlands for more than five years. The second is if the student or a parent is a migrant worker. A migrant worker is someone who works more than 32 hours a month and earns more than 50% of the social assistance standard (in Dutch: *bijstandsnorm*). EEA students working between 24 and 32 hours will have their applications for a basic grant assessed by DUO on an individual basis.

EEA students can apply for a supplementary grant on top of their basic grant if their parents earn less than about €70,000 per year. This raises another interesting issue because that amount is higher than the average annual income in some European countries.

Read more about the basic grant, supplementary grant and the conditions [here](#).

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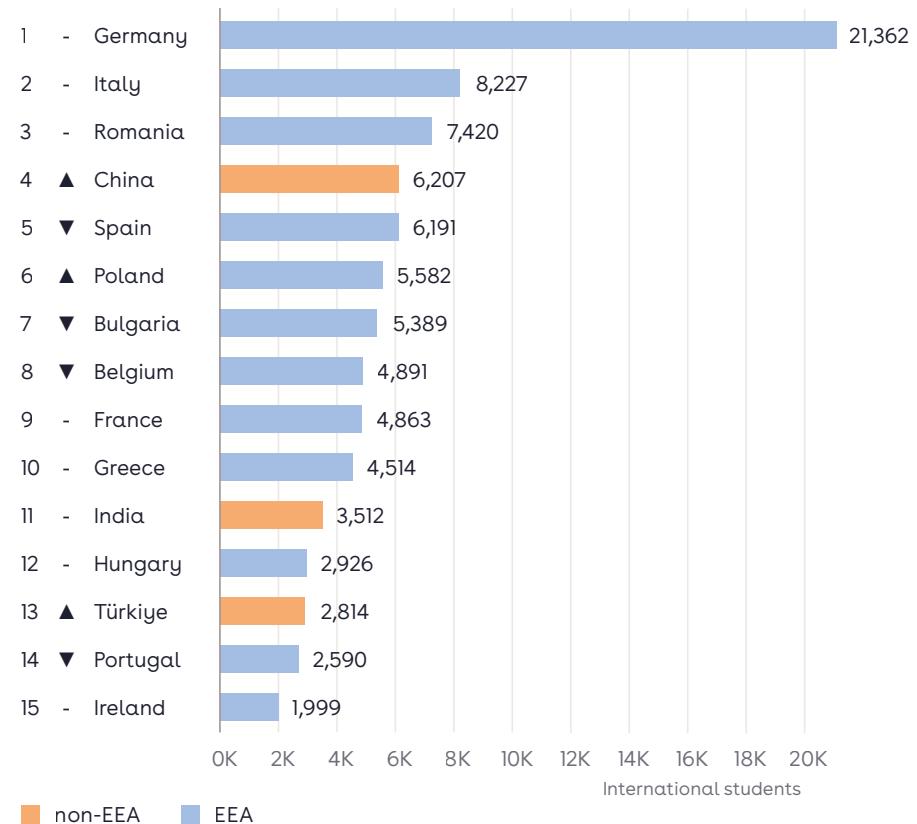
3.2 Top countries of origin

Largest increase in international students from Poland

As in the previous two years, the top 3 most common countries of origin for international degree students in 2023-24 comprised only EEA countries; namely Germany, Italy, and Romania (see Figures 11 and 12). Though still ranked first, Germany saw the largest decline in the total number of international students compared to the previous academic year (-1,387, -6.1%; see also [Spotlight on new enrolments from Germany](#)). Meanwhile, in second and third place respectively, Italy (+583, +7.6%) and Romania (+709, +10.6%) both saw a steady increase in their degree student populations in the Netherlands.

China remained the only non-EEA country of origin in the top 10 in 2023-24. With its growing degree student population in the Netherlands (+624, +11.2%), China rose to 4th place, overtaking Spain (+588, +10.5%; see also [Spotlight on new enrolments from China](#)). Though the number of international students increased for the majority of countries of origin in the top 15, the largest absolute increase was from Poland (+934, +20.1%). This lead Poland to overtake Bulgaria as the 6th most common country of origin in 2023-24 (up from 8th in 2022-23). The fastest relative growth in the top 15 was shown by Türkiye (+553, +24.5%), which moved up to 13th place, ahead of Portugal. Out of the top 5 since 2022-23, neighbouring Belgium dropped further down the ranking in 2023-24, with the 8th largest international degree student population in the Netherlands (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Top 15 countries of origin for international degree students studying in the Netherlands in 2023-24



Note: Symbols indicate a higher (▲), lower (▼), or unchanged (-) ranking relative to the academic year 2022-23.

For more detailed information on all countries, see our dashboards [Countries of origin](#) and [Top 10 countries of origin over time](#).



Figure 12. Change over time in the top 5 countries of origin for international degree students with yearly totals per country (2006-7 to 2023-24)

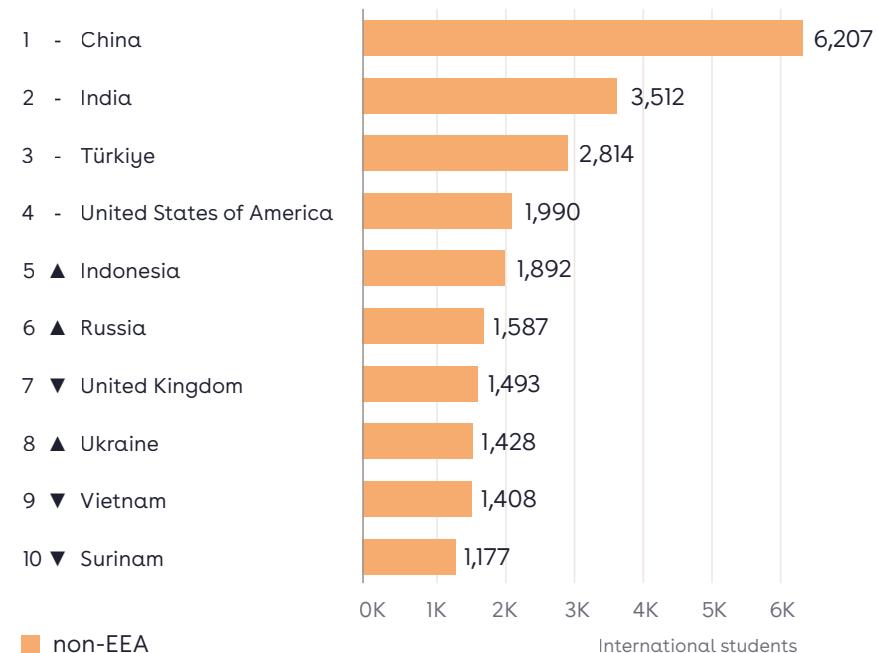




UK no longer ranks among top 5 non-EEA countries

In 2023-24, the top 10 non-EEA countries of origin for international degree students remained the same as in 2022-23, though there were some changes in the ranking. China maintained its top position among non-EEA countries by a significant margin (see Figure 13). Among the top 10 non-EEA countries, it also had the largest absolute increase in total student numbers (+624), bringing the total number of students from China to 6,207 in 2023-24. The UK was the only country in the top 10 to see a decline in the number of international students (-338, -18.5%; see also [Spotlight on new enrolments from the UK](#)). The UK dropped to 7th place, making 2023-24 the first academic year in which it did not rank in the top 5 non-EEA countries. Meanwhile, Indonesia (+195, +11.5%) and Russia (+190, +13.6%) climbed to 5th and 6th place, respectively. 2022-23 was the first academic year that Ukraine made it to the top 10 non-EEA countries of origin. In 2023-24, Ukraine went from 10th to 8th place, with the fastest year-on-year increase among the top 10 non-EEA countries (+348, +32.2%). This brought the total Ukrainian student population in the Netherlands to 1,428 (see also [Spotlight on new enrolments from Ukraine](#)). With the rise of Ukraine, Vietnam (+131, +10.3%) and Surinam (+90, +8.3%) became 9th and 10th most common non-EEA country of origin respectively.

Figure 13. Top 10 non-EEA countries of origin for international degree students studying in the Netherlands in 2023-24



Note: Symbols indicate a higher (▲), lower (▼), or unchanged (-) ranking relative to the academic year 2022-23.

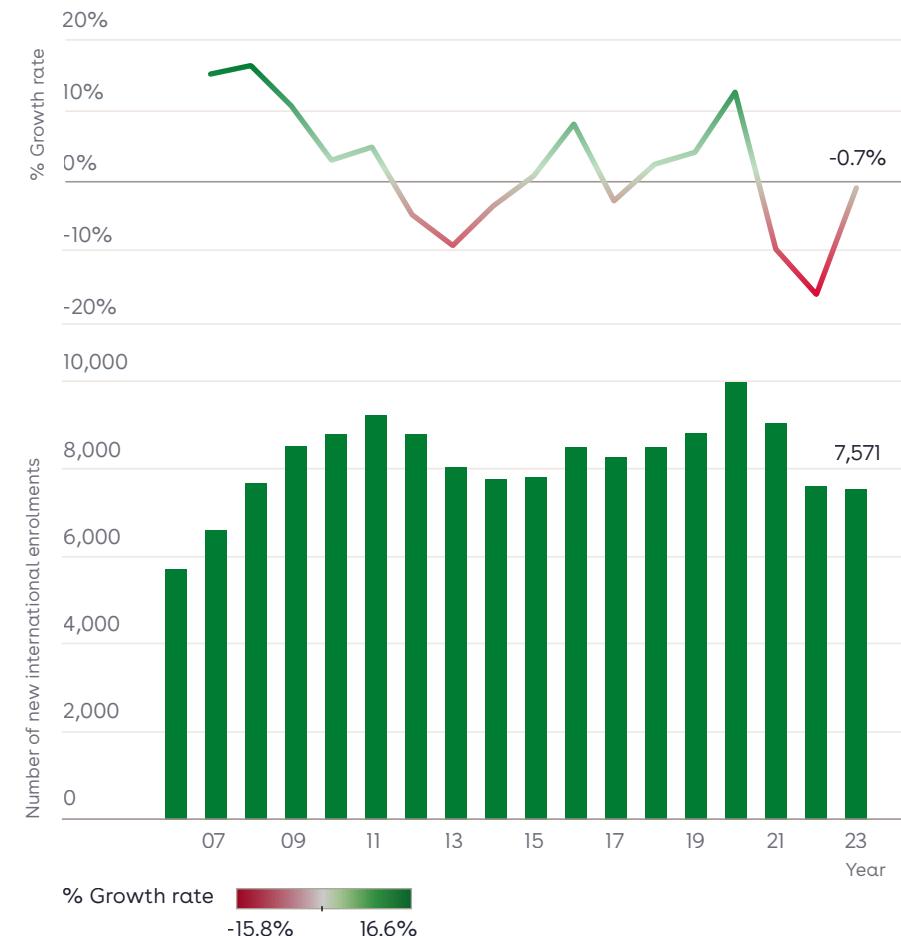


3.3 Spotlight on new enrolments from Germany, China, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom

Downward trend in new enrolments from Germany stabilises

As shown in Figure 14, the number of new enrolments from neighbouring Germany reached a peak of almost 10,000 in 2020-21 (9,991), only to shrink by 9.4% the next year, and by a further 15.8% in 2022-23 (-1,430). One likely contributor to this sharp decline was the change in German law concerning the training of psychotherapists, which makes it less easy for psychology graduates to enter the profession with a foreign diploma (Nuffic, 2023). Nevertheless, the number of new German enrolments in Dutch higher education appeared to stabilise in 2023-24 (-0.7%, -55). At 7,571, new students from Germany accounted for the largest share of all new international enrolments in 2023-24 (14.6%).

Figure 14. Yearly growth rate and total number of newly-enrolled students from Germany (2006-07 to 2023-24)

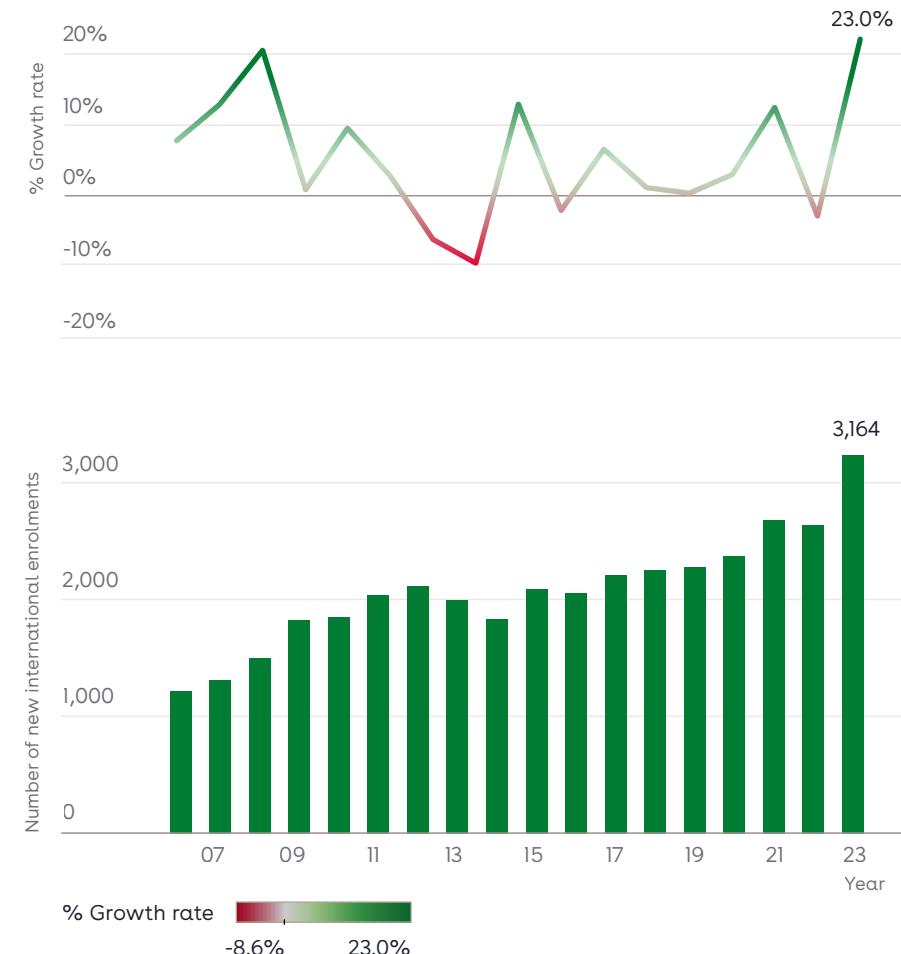




Spike in new enrolments from China

Since 2006, China has been the only non-EEA country to consistently make the top 5 countries of origin for international degree students (see Figure 12). For the most part, the number of new enrolments from China has grown or remained stable over the years (see Figure 15). 2023-24 saw the sharpest year-on-year increase to date in the number of newly-enrolled Chinese degree students (+23%). This uptick may in part be attributed to China lifting the strict travel restrictions introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic and re-opening its borders in January 2023. It is possible that some aspiring international students from China postponed studying abroad until after the borders were reopened and travel (including return visits to see family) became easier. There were 3,164 new students from China in 2023-24, accounting for 6.1% of all new international enrolments in the Netherlands (up from 5.1% the previous year). Almost 1 in 3 newly-enrolled Chinese students pursued a degree in the field of Economics (29.6%).

Figure 15. Yearly growth rate and total number of newly-enrolled students from China (2006-07 to 2023-24)

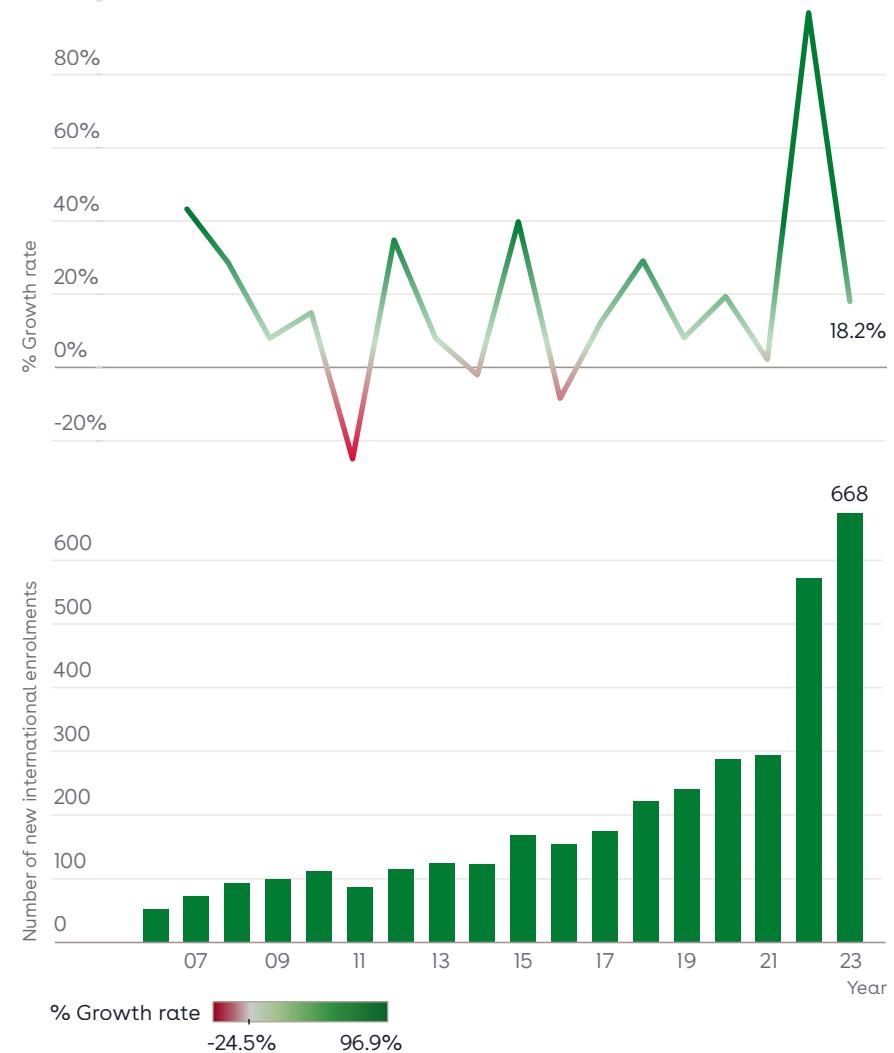




New intake from Ukraine continues to grow, though at a slower rate

The first academic year after the start of the war in Ukraine, 2022-23 saw the fastest year-on-year increase in the number of new degree students from Ukraine (+96.9%, +278; see Figure 16). Although at a slower rate, the upward trend persisted in 2023-24 (+18.2%, +103), bringing the total number of newly-enrolled Ukrainian students in Dutch higher education to 668 (see [Current Development 4](#)). This accounted for a small share of all new international enrolments in 2023-24 (1.3%).

Figure 16. Yearly growth rate and total number of newly-enrolled students from Ukraine (2006-07 to 2023-24)





Current development 4: Status of Ukrainian refugees

As of 22 March 2024, there were 108,900 registered Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands ([Rijksoverheid, 2024](#)). This group receives temporary protection in the Netherlands under the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive (RTB), which will be in force until at least 4 March 2025. Under this directive, Ukrainian refugees have a different status from other refugees or asylum seekers.

In the Nuffic mobility figures, students with Ukraine as their country of origin include both regular international students and students under the RTB. Young people who came here as secondary school students and have meanwhile gained their secondary school diploma in the Netherlands do not count as international students in the Nuffic mobility figures because they do not have a foreign prior education.

Students from Ukraine who fall under the RTB are not entitled to student financial support from the government (the basic grant as described in [Current development 3](#), and public transport card). For the academic year 2022-23, many higher education institutions reduced their fees for Ukrainian students to the statutory tuition fee, using their own resources. This year, most universities of applied sciences and research universities are charging the higher institutional fee, which is applicable to other international students from outside the EEA. Students who had already started studying will continue to pay the lower (statutory) tuition fee. Students with refugee status from other countries pay the statutory tuition fee and are eligible for student grants.

Students from Ukraine covered by the RTB can also apply for a study visa. This option at least gives students the stability to complete their studies, but the applicant must demonstrate sufficient financial resources to pay tuition fees and meet their living expenses.

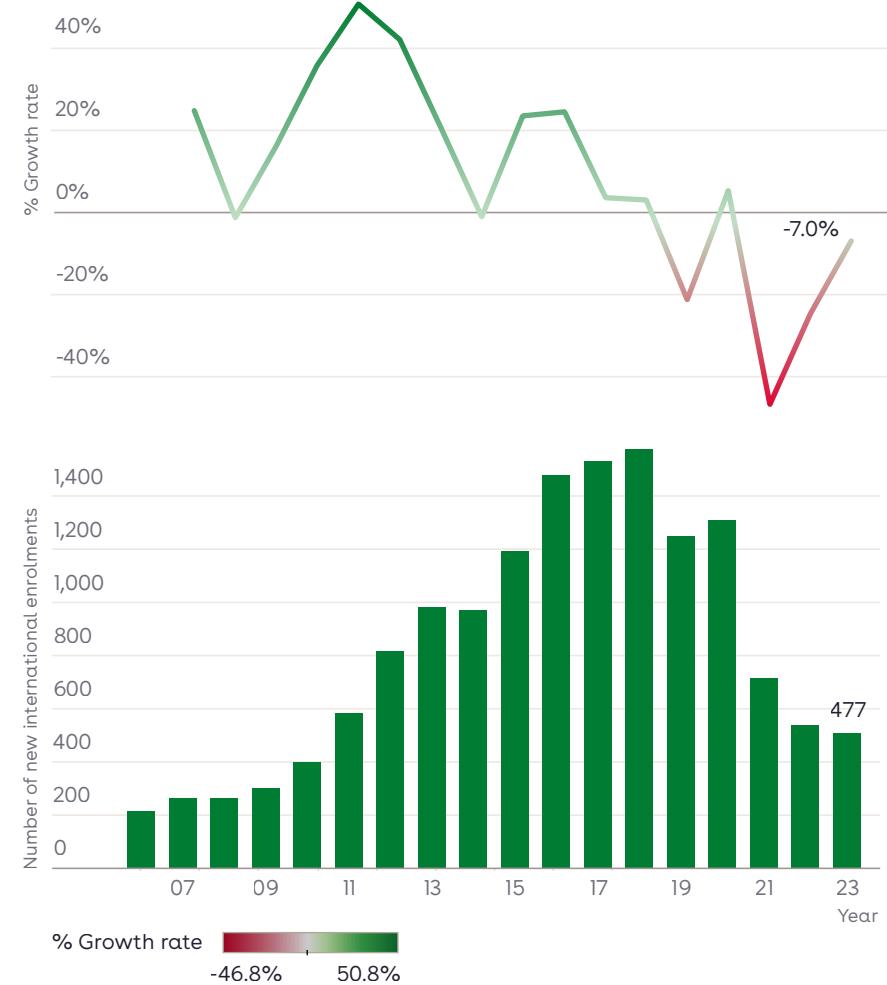
For more information, please see: [Directive Temporary Protection Ukraine | IND and Ukraine - UAF](#)



Number of new enrolments from the UK continues to shrink post Brexit

Since its full withdrawal from the European Union (EU) in January 2021, there has been a significant decline in incoming degree mobility from the UK. As Figure 17 shows, 2021-22 saw the steepest year-on-year decrease in the number of newly-enrolled UK students, with almost half as many compared to the previous year (-46.8%, -599). The intake of new students from the UK continued to shrink in 2022-23 (-24.8%) and 2023-24 (-7%). The current academic year saw 477 UK students start a degree programme in the Netherlands, accounting for 0.9% of all new international enrolments. For comparison, in 2020-21, the last academic year before Brexit took effect, there were 1,281 newly-enrolled students from the UK, making up 3% of the total.

Figure 17. Yearly growth rate and total number of newly-enrolled students from (2006-07 to 2023-24)





4. Fields of study

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4.1 Universities of applied sciences

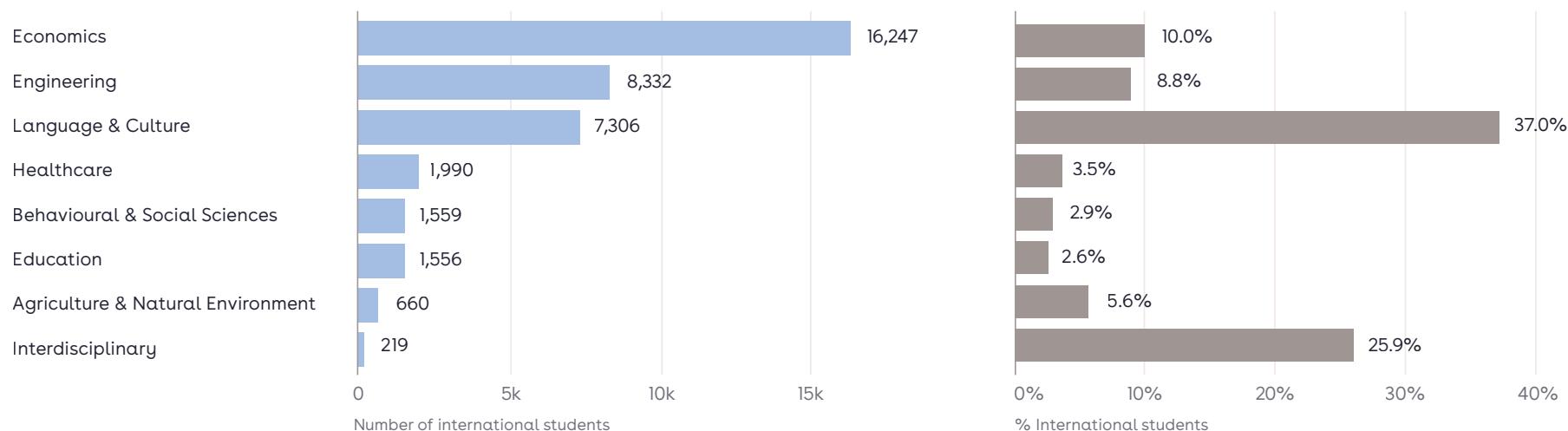
Economics attracts the most international students while Engineering still growing the fastest

With 16,247 international degree students enrolled, Economics was again the largest UAS field of study in absolute terms (see Figure 18). 10% of UAS Economics students were international in 2023-24, up from 9.3% the previous year. Engineering was the second most common field of study amongst international students at universities of applied sciences (8,332), followed by

Language & Culture (7,306). While all UAS fields of study saw international student numbers increase relative to 2022-23, Engineering showed the fastest year-on-year growth for the second consecutive year (+13.4%).

In relative terms, Language and Culture was the most international field of study, with more than 1 in 3 students coming from abroad (37%). Education (2.6%) and Behavioral & Social sciences (2.9%) were the least international fields of study at universities of applied sciences.

Figure 18. International degree students at universities of applied sciences (total number and share) per field of study (2023-24)





4.2 Research universities

Economics overtakes Behavioural & Social Sciences as the most popular RU field of study

As in previous years, Economics, Behavioural & Social Sciences, and Engineering made up the top three fields of study for international students at research universities in 2023-24 (see Figure 19). Economics emerged as the top choice for international students for the first time since 2017-18, with 1,512 more international students enrolled than the year before (+8.8%).

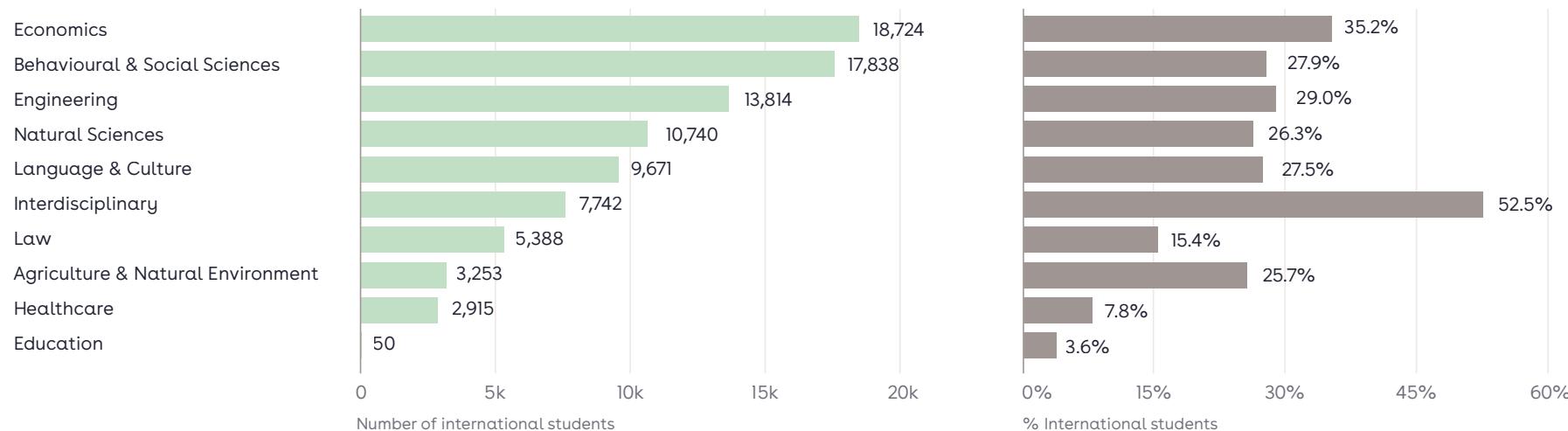
While the majority of RU fields of study saw growth in the

absolute number of international students enrolled, there was a 4.4% decrease in international students studying Healthcare relative to 2022-23 (-134).

More than half of students enrolled on Interdisciplinary programmes are international

Interdisciplinary programmes again had the highest proportion of international students in 2023-24, at 52.5%. This is the first time since 2006 that more than half of the students enrolled in an RU field of study have been international. Economics is also a highly international field in relative terms, with more than 1 in 3 students coming from abroad (35.2%).

Figure 19. International degree students at research universities (total number and share) per field of study (2023-24)





4.3 Fields of study related to sectors with labour shortages



Sectors with labour shortages

When we talk about a sector, we mean a group of businesses and organisations that share the same or similar operational activity: either products or services. The so-called "Tekortsectoren" or sectors with labour shortages have played a central role in Dutch economic policy in recent years. For decades, the Netherlands has faced two types of labour shortages: one related to economic cycles of growth and demand, the other related to societal changes.

The labour shortages caused by the current economic cycle are expected to decrease in 2024, as more businesses go bankrupt and jobs are cut due to the cyclical decline in demand for goods and services. The labour shortages caused by societal changes are less dependent on the economic situation, and will most likely persist in 2024 and the years to come.

The societal changes facing the Netherlands are, amongst others:

- The **aging population** results in growing demand for health- and elderly care, which are typically labour-intensive sectors.
- **Digitalisation:** as almost all products and services are increasingly digital, there is a persistent demand for technical talent.
- The **green transition** will also involve considerable technical adaptations and innovation, for which technical and innovative minds are required.
- **Demographic development:** The population of the Netherlands is still growing due to immigration. In the longer term, a rise in birth rates is also projected. These developments will further heighten the demand for professionals in the education sector, especially teachers.

For more information see: [Prognose en trends \(werk.nl\)](#)



The fields of Technical studies¹, Healthcare, and Education have the most direct relation to the sectors with the largest labour shortages in the Netherlands. In 2023-24, one third of all international students at universities of applied sciences and research universities combined (33.8%) was enrolled in one of these key fields for the Dutch labour market.

As shown in Figure 20, the overall share of international students pursuing technical studies has grown steadily over the last 10 years, from 21% in 2013-14 to 28.7% in 2023-24. The proportion of Dutch students enrolled on technical study programmes in 2023-24 was smaller, at 25.4%. This percentage has remained largely stable over the past decade.

In absolute terms, technical studies have seen a more than three-fold increase since 2013-14 in the number of international degree students enrolled (from 11,784 to 36,799). This growth rate exceeds that of the total international student population, which roughly doubled in size in the same period. The top 3 technical study programmes for international students in 2023-24 were Computer Science & Engineering (RU), Mechanical Engineering (RU and UAS), and Artificial Intelligence (RU).

Smaller shares of international students opt for studies in the fields of Healthcare (3.8% in 2023-24) and Education (1.3%). Figure 20 shows a downward trend in the overall percentage of internationals studying Healthcare in the last decade, from 5.7% to 3.8%. For comparison, 13.2% of all Dutch students were enrolled on Healthcare programmes in 2023-24 (up from 11.3% in 2013-14). Amongst the 4,905 international Healthcare students in 2023-24, the top 3 study programmes were Physiotherapy (UAS), Biomedical sciences (RU), and Medicine (RU).

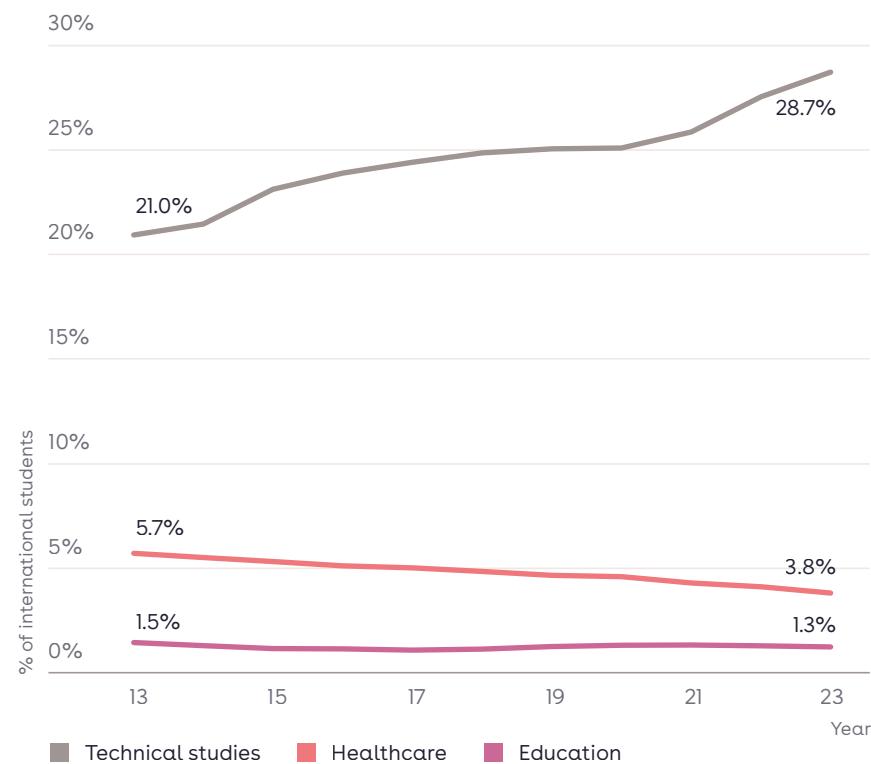
Although small (1.3% in 2023-24), the percentage of international degree students enrolled on Education programmes has remained stable over the past decade (see Figure 20). A relatively larger proportion of the Dutch student population studies Education (8.9% in 2023-24), but this has steadily declined over the last 10 years. In 2023-24, there were 1,606 international students pursuing a degree in Education, most of them at a university of applied sciences. The programmes with the most international enrolments were Educational Needs, International Teacher Education for Primary Schools, and Teacher Education in English (all UAS).

¹ We classify the following fields of study as technical: Engineering, Natural Sciences, and Agriculture & Natural Environment. See also [Staying after graduation: Spotlight on technical talent \(nuffic.nl\)](#).



Figure 20. Trends in the percentage of international students enrolled in fields of study related to sectors with labour shortages (UAS and RU combined; 2013-14 to 2023-24)

For more detailed information on fields of study and study programmes, see our dashboard [Fields of study](#).

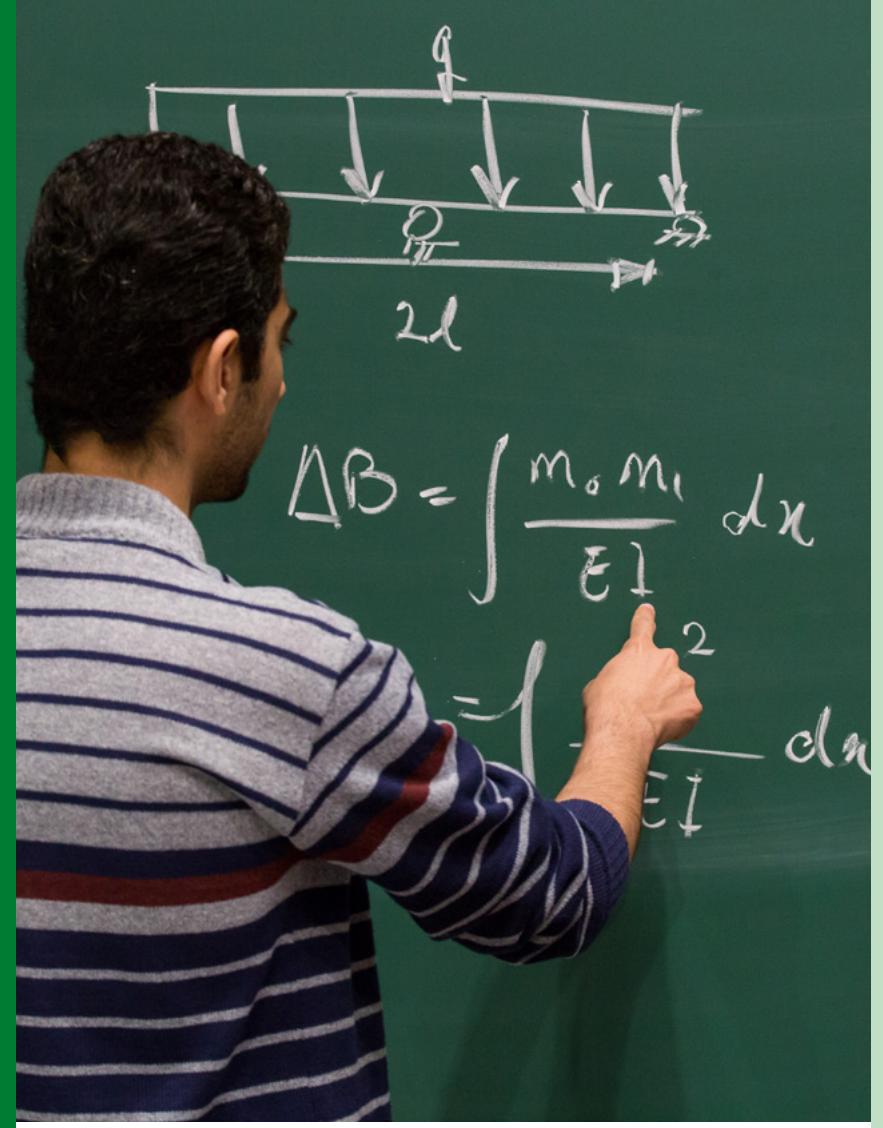


Note: Technical studies is a grouping of Engineering, Agriculture & Natural Environment, and Natural Sciences.



5. Study programmes

- 5.1 Universities of applied sciences 37
- 5.2 Research universities 38





5.1 Universities of applied sciences

International Business maintains top position at universities of applied sciences

In 2023-24, 6,166 international degree students studied International Business at Dutch universities of applied sciences, making it the most popular UAS study programme for the 18th consecutive year (see Figure 21). The second most popular study programme in absolute terms was Music (2,490 international students), followed by Design (2,133). Of these three, Music was the only study programme not to see growth in international student numbers relative to 2022-23. There was also a notable increase

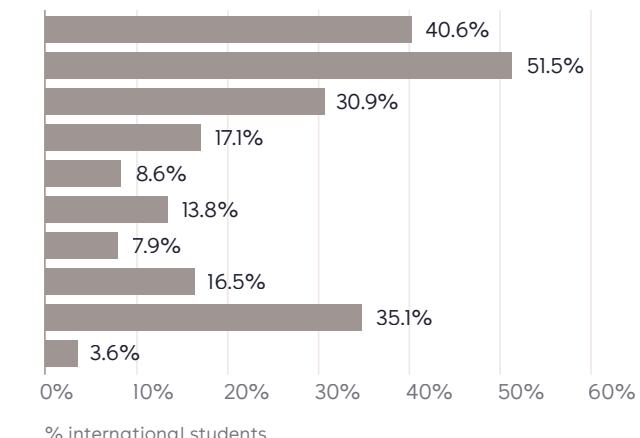
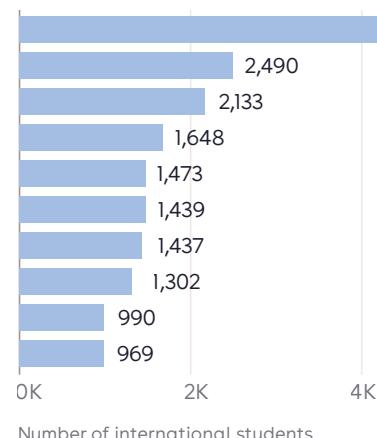
in international students studying Information & Communication Technology (1,473), making it the 5th most popular UAS study programme in 2023-24, up from 8th place the previous year.

Just over half of UAS Music students from abroad

More than half of all students studying Music were international (51.5%; see Figure 21). This remains almost the same as the previous year's percentage of 51.6%. International Business had the next highest share of international students (40.6%, up from 37% in 2022-23). In third place, the UAS study programme Creative Media & Game Technologies was 35.1% international in 2023-24, up from 32.7% the previous academic year.

Figure 21. Top 10 study programmes at universities of applied sciences with the most international degree students enrolled; absolute numbers and percentage international (2023-24)

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | International Business |
| 2 | Music |
| 3 | Design |
| 4 | Creative Business |
| 5 | Information & Communication Technology |
| 6 | Physiotherapy |
| 7 | Marketing Management |
| 8 | Hospitality Management |
| 9 | Creative Media & Game Technologies |
| 10 | Social Work |





5.2 Research universities

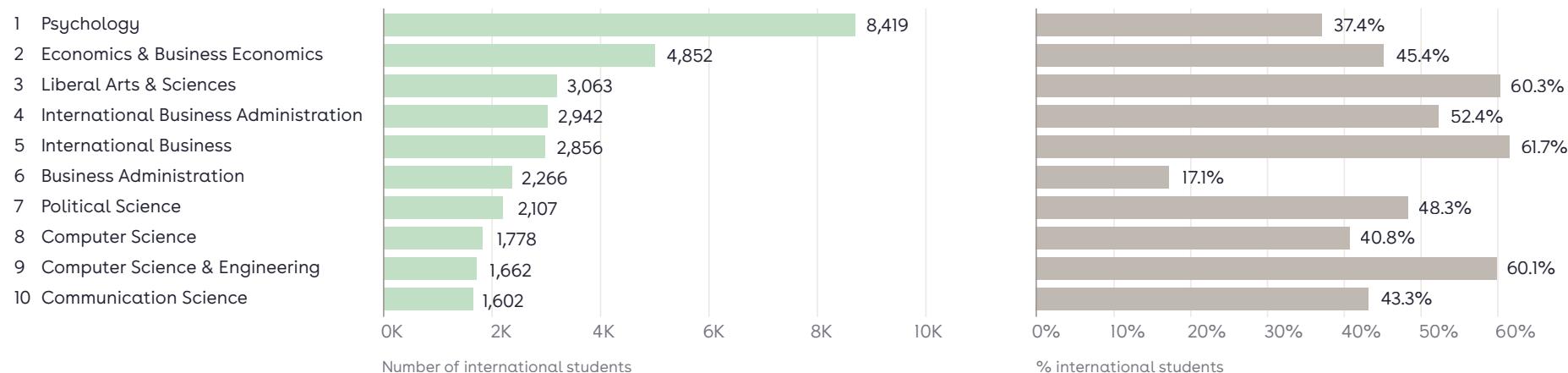
Psychology still attracts the largest number of international students

With 8,419 international degree students enrolled, Psychology remained the most popular RU study programme amongst international students in 2023-24 (see Figure 22), although numbers were down slightly on the previous year (-170). The second largest study programme was Economics & Business Economics (4,852), which also saw a notable increase in international student numbers in 2023-24 (+533). This was followed by Liberal Arts & Sciences, with 3,063 international students enrolled (+133).

More than 6 in 10 International Business students at research universities international

Some 61.7% of all International Business students at research universities were international in 2023-24, up from 59.8% the previous year. Liberal Arts & Sciences as well as Computer Science & Engineering also had large shares of international students (60.3% and 60.1% respectively, up from 57.3% and 57.4%). In addition, around half of all students studying International Business Administration (52.4%) and Political Science (48.3%) came from abroad in 2023-24.

Figure 22. Top 10 study programmes at research universities with the most international degree students enrolled; absolute numbers and percentage international (2023-24)





6. Dutch higher education institutions





University of Amsterdam maintains the largest international degree student population

For the third consecutive year, the University of Amsterdam (UvA) was the Dutch higher education institution with the largest number of international degree students (14,855; see Figure 23). Maastricht University followed with 13,017 international degree students enrolled. The University of Groningen completed the absolute top 3 (9,429). Of all HEIs in the absolute top 10, the UvA (+8.3%) and Maastricht University (+8%) also saw the largest growth in their international student populations relative to 2022-23. Only Delft University of Technology recorded fewer international students than the previous year (6,640, -0.7%), dropping to 6th place behind Leiden University (6,787). As in previous years, Fontys University of Applied Sciences was the single UAS to hold a place in the absolute top 10 HEIs (8th), with 6,152 international students enrolled.

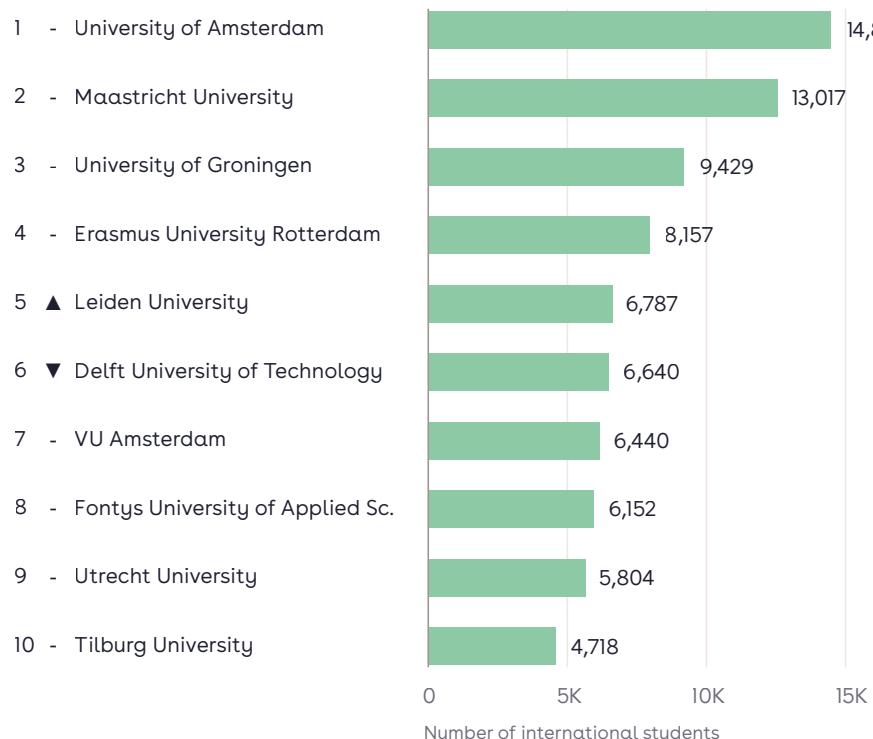
6 in 10 degree students at Maastricht University are international

Some 59.6% of all degree students at Maastricht University were international in 2023-24, up from 57% the previous year. This makes Maastricht University once again the most international HEI in relative terms. The UvA also saw an increase in the percentage of its student population coming from abroad, from 32.6% to 34.5%, and replaced the University of Twente (33.6%) as the second most international HEI. The universities of applied sciences in the relative top 10 were Amsterdam School of the Arts in 4th place, with 30.3% of its students coming from abroad, Hotelschool The Hague (5th; 25.8%) and ArtEZ Institute of the Arts (10th; 24.1%).

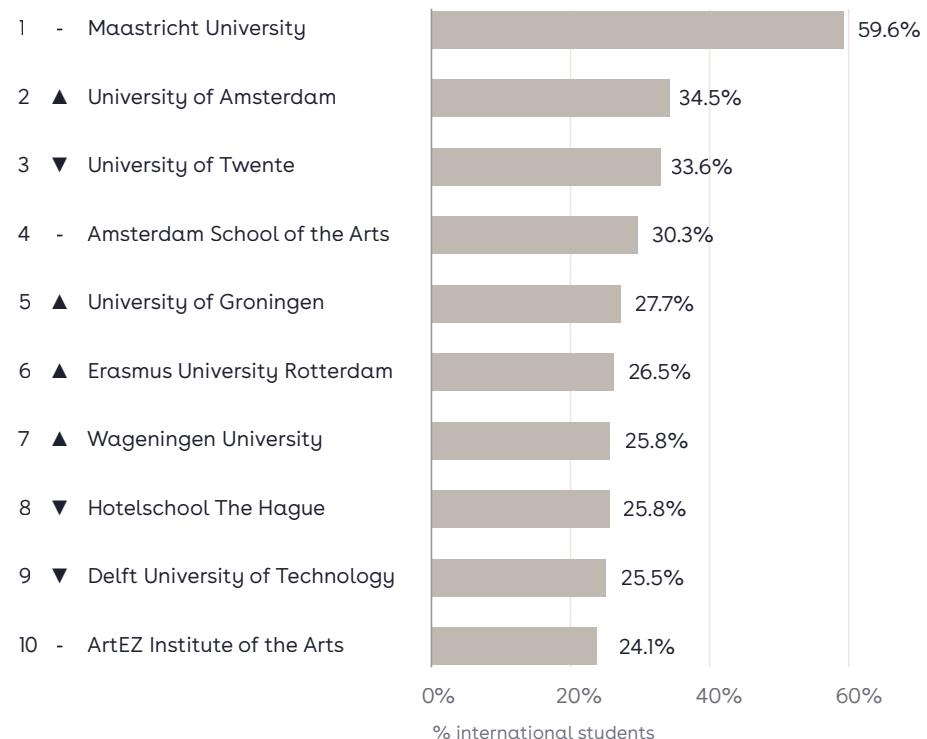


Figure 23. International degree students in Dutch higher education, top 10 institutions (2023-24)

Top 10 institutions with the most international degree students in 2023-24



Top 10 institutions with the largest percentage of students international in 2023-24



Note: Only institutions with more than 2,000 enrolled students are included in the relative top 10. Symbols indicate a higher (▲), lower (▼), or unchanged (-) ranking relative to the academic year 2022-23.

For more detailed information on higher education institutions, see our dashboard [Regions and universities](#).



7. Regional differences



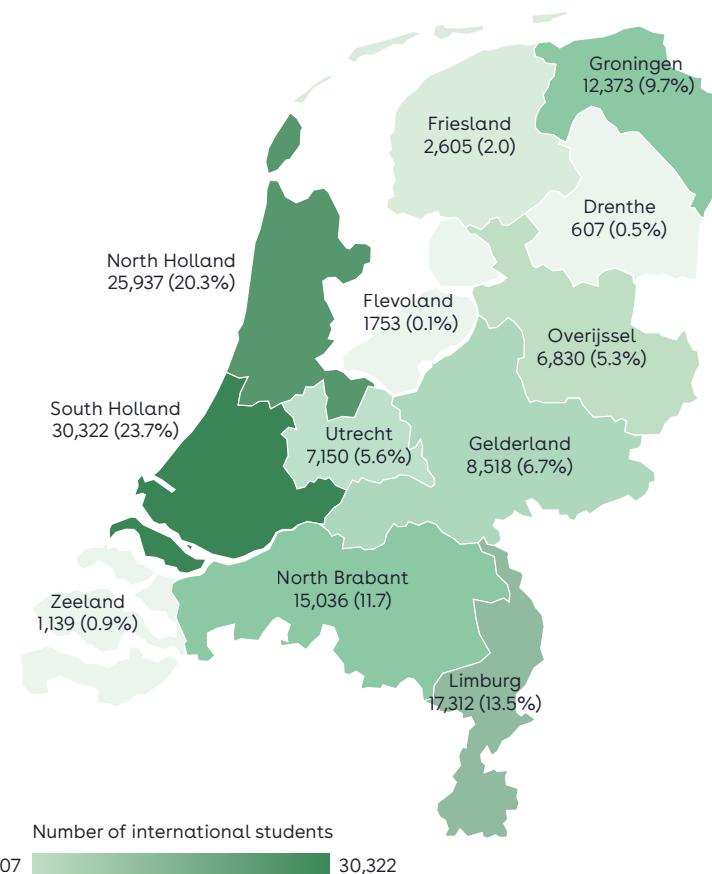


The location data presented in this chapter are based on the specific site of the institution where a student is enrolled. This is to account for the fact that some higher education institutions have sites in multiple municipalities or provinces. For example, the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) also has a campus in Friesland. A student who studies at the Friesland campus of the RUG will now have the province of Friesland as their location. NB: This is therefore not directly comparable to the geographical data published in previous reports, which were based on the official main address of the hosting institution rather than the specific location at which a student studies.

More than 4 in 10 international students based in South or North Holland

As Figure 24 shows, the province of South Holland has the largest international student population in 2023-24, followed by North Holland. Together, these western provinces are home to 56,259 international degree students, or 44% of all internationals studying in the Netherlands. In the south of the country, Limburg (17,312) and North Brabant (15,036) also have substantial international student populations, as does Groningen (12,373) in the north. Each of these provinces is host to around 1 in 10 international degree students in 2023-24. Far fewer international students pursue their studies in Zeeland (1,139, 0.9%), Drenthe (607, 0.5%) and Flevoland (175, 0.1%).

Figure 24. Number of international degree students and percentage of total international student population per province in 2023-24



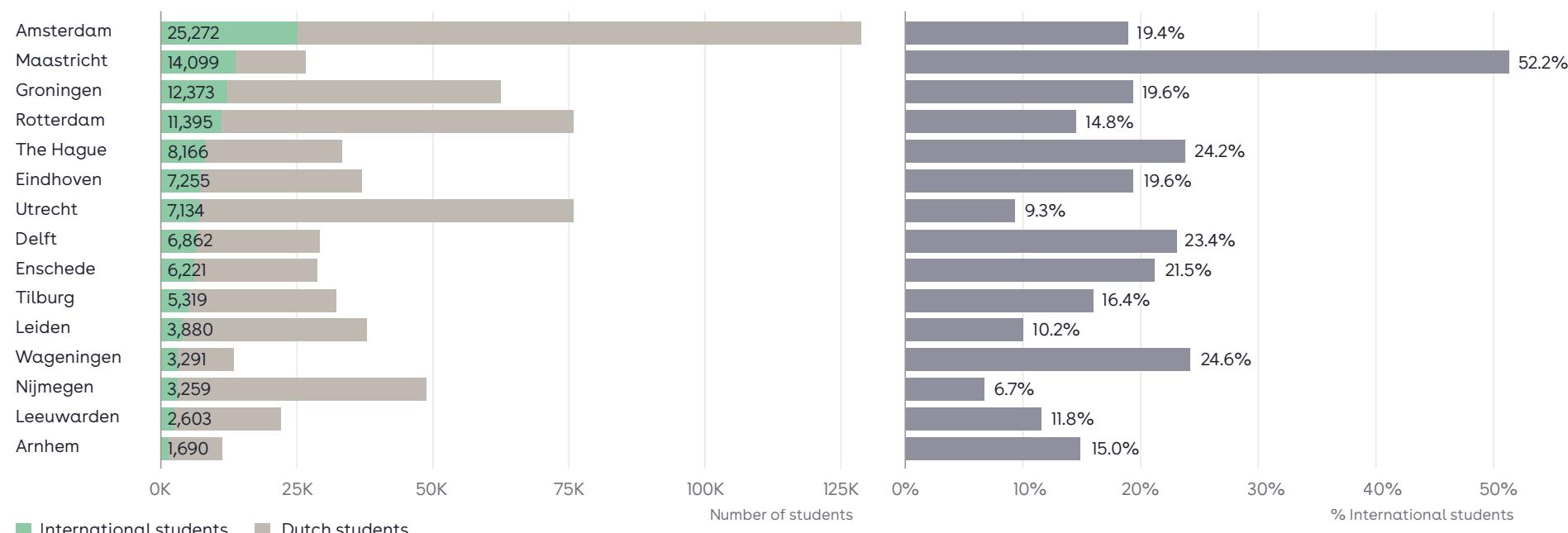


Maastricht, Wageningen and Delft the most international cities in relative terms

With a total student population of over 130,000, Amsterdam remains the largest student city in the Netherlands by a considerable margin (see Figure 25). Amsterdam is also host to the largest number of international degree students in 2023-24 (25,272), followed by Maastricht (14,099) and Groningen (12,373). This mirrors the results presented in the previous chapter, Dutch

higher education institutions. While in Amsterdam (19.4%) and Groningen (19.6%) approximately 1 in 5 students is international, just over half of all degree students in Maastricht come from abroad (52.2%), making it the most international student city in relative terms. After Maastricht, the highest concentration of international students can be found in Wageningen (24.6%) and Delft (23.4%). In the cities of Utrecht and Nijmegen on the other hand, at least 90% of the student population is Dutch.

Figure 25. Number of international degree students, total student population, and percentage international in the top 15 municipalities with the most international students in 2023-24





8. Language of instruction

- | | |
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| 8.1 Language of instruction at universities of applied sciences and research universities | 46 |
| 8.2 Language choices of research university students | 49 |





Data on the language of instruction of each study programme at research universities is collected annually by Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), beginning in the academic year 2016-17. As equivalent data for universities of applied sciences is not currently available, we report statistics recently published by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (in Dutch: Vereniging Hogescholen, VH) in a [letter to Minister Dijkgraaf](#) (see [Current development 2](#)). Note: The statistics for RU and UAS presented below are not directly comparable due to differences in the criteria used to determine the language of instruction of a given programme.

8.1 Language of instruction at universities of applied sciences and research universities

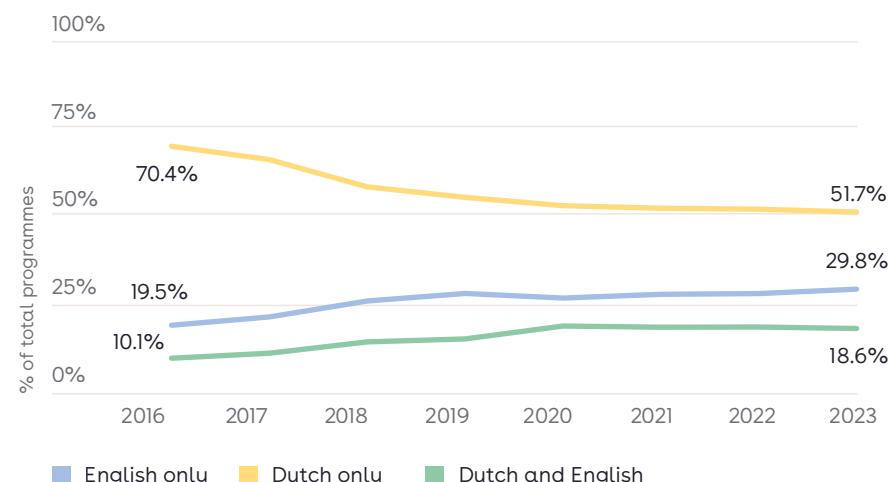
Dutch-taught programmes account for 80% of the total bachelor's offer at universities of applied sciences

According to a [recent review](#) conducted by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, 80% of all UAS study programmes at bachelor's level were taught exclusively in Dutch in 2023-24, and a further 12% at least partially in Dutch. A minority of UAS bachelor's programmes (8%) were only available in a foreign language. 8 of the 36 universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands offered 100% of their programmes in Dutch.

Half of all research university bachelor's programmes available only in Dutch

In the academic year 2023-24, just over half of all 420 RU bachelor's programmes were offered in Dutch only (51.7%), 29.8% in English only and 18.6% in both languages. Figure 26 shows a decrease over time in the share of programmes taught exclusively in Dutch at bachelor's level, and a relative increase in the availability of English-only programmes and those with both a Dutch- and English-language variant. Since 2020-21, however, the respective shares of all three types have remained reasonably stable.

Figure 26. Percentage of RU bachelor's programmes offered exclusively in English, exclusively in Dutch, and in both languages over the period 2016-17 to 2023-24



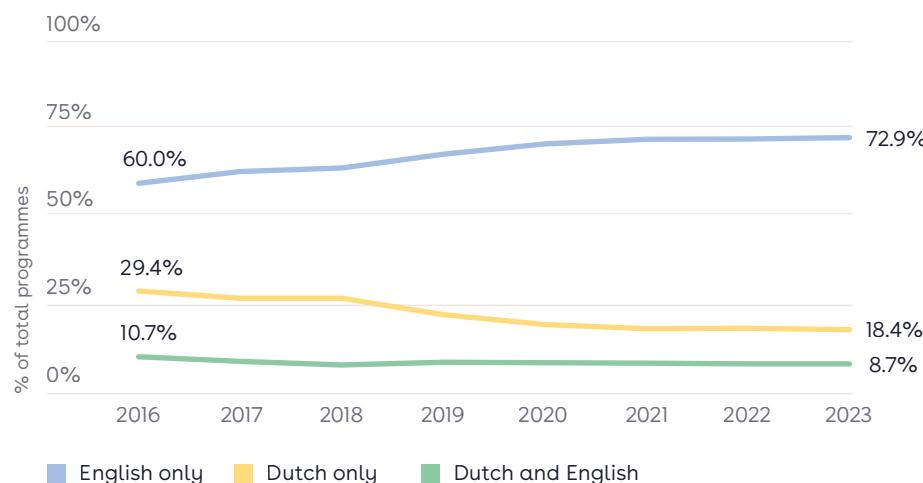


Steady growth in English-taught programmes at master's level since 2016

At RU master's level, English remains the predominant language of instruction by a considerable margin (see Figure 27).

Almost three quarters of all 750 research university master's programmes in 2023-24 were available exclusively in English (72.9%), while roughly 1 in 5 programmes was only available in Dutch (18.4%). A small minority of programmes had both a Dutch- and an English-language variant (8.7%). Figure 27 shows a steady increase over time in the proportion of English-taught master's programmes relative to the Dutch-language offer.

Figure 27. Percentage of RU master's programmes offered exclusively in English, exclusively in Dutch, and in both languages over the period 2016-17 to 2023-24



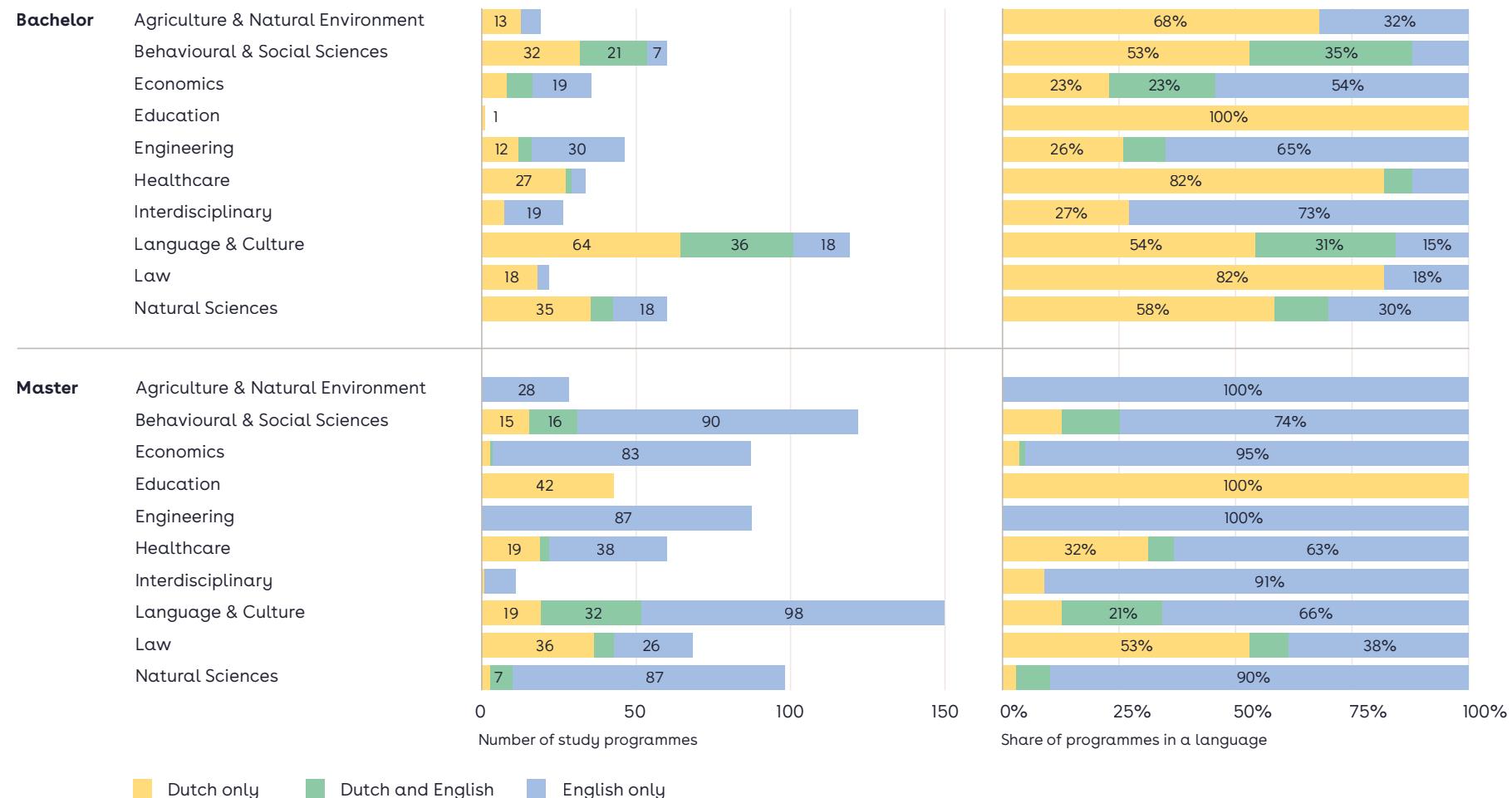
Dutch the main teaching language in 7 out of 10 fields of study at bachelor's level

As shown in Figure 28, bachelor's programmes in the fields of Law (82%), Healthcare (82%) and Education (100%) were the most likely to be taught exclusively through Dutch. This may reflect the amount of course content in these subject areas that is specific to the Dutch national context. Only three fields of study were predominantly taught through English at bachelor's level: Interdisciplinary (73%), Engineering (65%) and Economics (54%).

In 2023-24, master's programmes within the fields of Agriculture & Natural Environment and Engineering were available exclusively in English (see Figure 28). The only fields with relatively more Dutch than English-taught programmes were Education, with all 42 master's programmes offered in Dutch only, and Law, with just over half of programmes in Dutch.



Figure 28. Number and share of RU programmes offered in English, Dutch and both languages, per type of education and field of study in 2023-24





8.2 Language choices of research university students

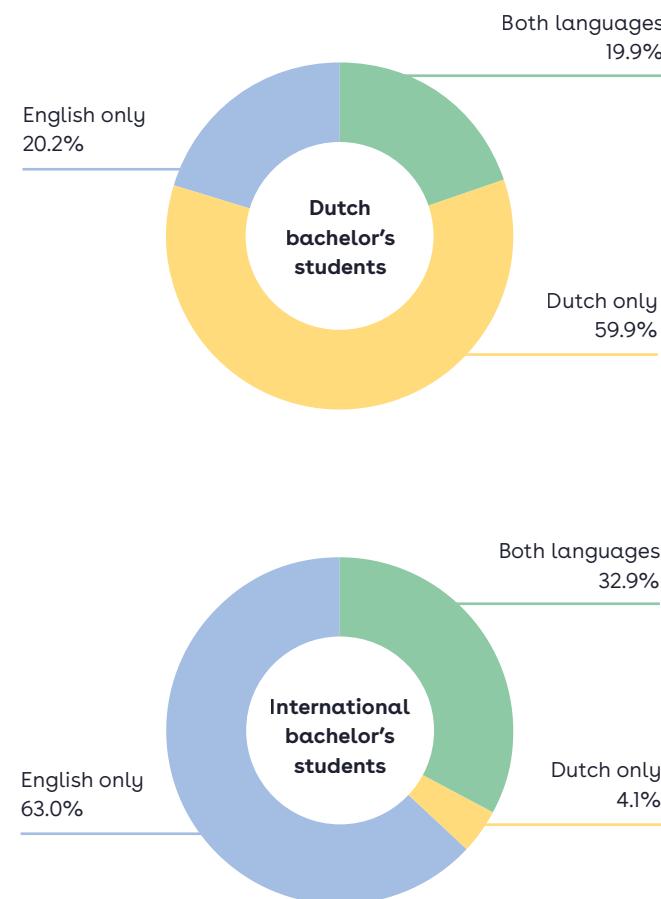
1 in 5 Dutch RU bachelor's students enrolled on English-taught programmes in 2023-24

Figures 29 and 30 show the choices made by Dutch and international students at research universities with regard to language of study. As seen in Figure 29, more than half of Dutch bachelor's students were enrolled on Dutch-taught programmes in 2023-24 (59.9%) and around 1 in 5 on an English-taught programme (20.2%) or a programme with two language tracks (19.9%). These percentages have remained stable since 2018-19.

2.2K international RU bachelor's students opt to study fully in Dutch

Amongst international bachelor's students at research universities, there is a strong tendency to choose study programmes taught exclusively in English (69.0% in 2023-24). Roughly one third was enrolled on a programme with both a Dutch and English language track (which track a student chooses is not indicated in the current dataset). A small proportion of international RU bachelor students opted to study fully in Dutch. This group comprised 2,229 students in 2023-24 (4.1% of the total).

Figure 29. Percentage of Dutch and international bachelor's students enrolled on programmes taught only in English, only in Dutch, or in both languages in 2023-24.



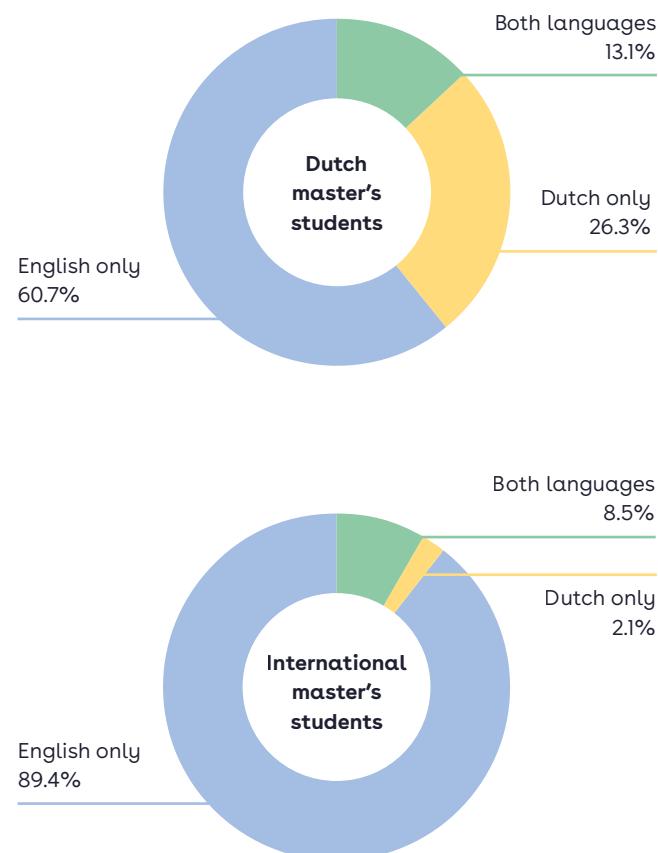


Both Dutch and international master's students most likely to study through English

When looking at the language choices of research university master's students (Figure 30), it is important to note the limited number of Dutch-taught master's programmes on offer (18.4% in 2023-24). Nevertheless, about 1 in 4 Dutch master's students was enrolled on one of these programmes in 2023-24 (26.3%). By contrast, a small minority of international master's students chose to study entirely through Dutch (2.1%).

It is common for Dutch students at research universities to pursue their master's degree in English (60.7% in 2023-24). Amongst international master's students, the proportion learning through English is consistently around 90%. As seen in Figure 27, programmes with two language variants are much less widely available at master's level (8.7% in 2023-24). In 2023-24 these programmes were more popular amongst Dutch master's students (13.1%) than international master's students (8.5%).

Figure 30. Percentage of Dutch and international master's students enrolled on programmes taught only in English, only in Dutch, or in both languages in 2023-24.





Conclusion

Slowest growth in total international degree student population in 9 years

A total of 128,004 international degree students are enrolled at publicly-funded higher-education institutions in the Netherlands in 2023-24. This is 5% more than the previous academic year, marking the slowest growth in almost a decade. In total, about three-quarters (73%) of international students in the Netherlands pursue a bachelor's degree; 44% at a research university and 27% at a university of applied sciences. While relatively few international students study for a master's degree at a university of applied sciences, this group is growing the fastest (+9%).

At research universities, new international bachelor's enrolments plateau for the first time

For the first time since 2006 (the earliest available data), research university bachelor's programmes saw no year-on-year growth in new international enrolments. All other degree types received more new enrolments from international students relative to the previous year, resulting in an overall increase of 3%. Of all new enrolments received by Dutch higher education institutions in 2023-24, 51,899 were international, equivalent to 1 in 5.

Number of new students from Ukraine continues to grow

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of all international degree students come from within the European Economic Area (EEA), though the non-EEA student population is growing faster. After doubling in 2022-23, the number of new student enrolments from Ukraine continues to increase, though at a slower rate (+18%). The data also reveal a steep rise in new enrolments from China (+23%) in 2023-24, while the number of new enrolments from Germany remained stable following two years of decline.

Economics attracts the most international students while Engineering still growing the fastest

Economics is the largest field for international degree students at both research universities (18,724) and universities of applied sciences (16,247). However, for the second consecutive year, UAS Engineering is growing faster than any other field of study, with 13% more international students compared to 2022-23.



Three-fold increase in international enrolments on technical programmes in the last decade

Significantly for the Dutch labour market, the last decade has seen a three-fold increase in international students opting for technical studies such as Engineering. Some 29% of all international students now pursue a technical bachelor's or master's degree, compared to 25% of Dutch students. A much smaller percentage of international students opt to study Healthcare (4%) or Education (1%), the two other major sectors facing labour shortages in the Netherlands.

44% of all international degree students study in North and South Holland

There are large regional disparities in the spread of international students, with more than 4 out of 10 based in South or North Holland in 2023-24. Amsterdam has the largest international student population (25,272), while Maastricht (53%), Wageningen (25%) and Delft (23%) are the most international cities in relative terms. The major student cities Utrecht (9%) and Nijmegen (7%) have relatively low percentages of international students.

Not all international bachelor's students at research universities choose to study in English

The majority of bachelor's programmes at universities of applied sciences and research universities are available in Dutch only. In 2023-24, more than 2.2 thousand international bachelor's students at research universities are enrolled on Dutch-taught programmes. The share of RU bachelor's programmes offered only in English is 30% in 2023-24. These programmes attract 1 out of 5 Dutch bachelor's students at research universities.

There has been steady growth in English-taught programmes at RU master's level since 2016-17. Each year these programmes attract around 90% of all international master's students and 60% of Dutch master's students.

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