



**Maastricht University**



# For the Netherlands in Europe

**Maastricht University**

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# 01.

## Maastricht University: Socio-economic powerhouse

As a socio-economic powerhouse, Maastricht University (UM) is indispensable for the people living in and around the province of Limburg. It not only offers opportunities to the many thousands of young people from the Netherlands and abroad who study here, UM also contributes in many ways to work and welfare for the future. That stands or falls with customised legislation and regulations from government and parliament. This *position paper* sheds light on UM's current scientific and societal significance and points the way to avoid damaging it, therefore giving ample scope to its mission: *for the Netherlands in Europe*.

In the past five years, the number of foreign students in the Netherlands' higher education has doubled. Of the current 340,346 students at Dutch universities, almost 80,000 come from abroad, 14.2% more than in the previous academic year. This increase brings challenges for some universities. UM understands that these universities are asking for steering mechanisms that will allow them to manage the influx of foreign students. At the same time, UM does not understand if new laws and regulations are chosen that will unnecessarily harm universities to which these challenges do not apply.

1. Source: message dated 7 February 2022 on [www.universiteitenvannederland.nl](http://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl).

# 02.

## Customisation for Maastricht University

Maastricht University calls for the customisation of laws and regulations. International students contribute greatly to UM's prosperous development without bringing disadvantages. For UM, unnecessary regulations aimed at reducing the influx of foreign students can seriously and completely unnecessarily harm the university and its mission in society. Customisation should prevent national measures from lumping all universities together and stunting universities like UM in their prime. Choose for regulations only where they are needed. This is why UM indicated previously in the context of the proposed Language and Accessibility Act:

1. Do not make language a straitjacket that is crippling to the survival of a university, its own profile and specific circumstances;
2. Have confidence that universities deal responsibly with the use of an instrument such as a numerus fixus. They are in a better position than anyone else to manage the supply of programmes for students according to need. Replacing a notification requirement with a consent requirement is therefore undesirable;
3. Focus the legislation more on reducing the number of poor-quality (and generally non-admissible) applications from students outside the European Economic Area (EEA). The huge number of applications each year creates a large administrative burden.<sup>4</sup>
2. The agreement of the new government coalition Rutte IV states on managing the inflow of students and the supply of study programmes: 'If the existing and yet to be introduced instruments turn out to be insufficient to control shocks in the international student numbers, we will see if new instruments are needed'.  
<https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/detail?id=2021D50025&did=2021D50025>
3. All member states of the European Union, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland.
4. The handling fee (contribution to costs for diploma evaluation) has some effect. However, UM still finds that 78% of non-EEA applicants who have paid the handling fee still do not register. The many thousands of applicants who fail to pay the fee have already been filtered out of the system.

Requiring that all Dutch universities do not promote themselves internationally from now on is pointless. Universities that want to control or reduce their international intake have not promoted themselves for years. Despite this, international students continue to come to them.

## 03.

### UM: Knowledge, innovation and work

The closing of the Limburg mines was a major reason for founding Maastricht University in 1976; it was to give a lasting impetus to the province's socio-economic rebirth. To bring together sufficient critical mass, the Netherlands' youngest university decided to internationalise in the early 1990s. This choice was also linked to its connection to borderless scientific research and education and is inextricably linked to Limburg's location in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion, nestled between Germany and Belgium.

Together with its teachers and 22,000 students, UM drives developments in knowledge, innovation and employment. For example, to strengthen the competitiveness of Limburg and the Netherlands, it cooperates with the regional business community and the province in the Brightlands campuses. These are located in Maastricht, Heerlen, Sittard-Geleen and Venlo. In a globalising labour market, they offer perspective to both the region and students.

UM itself creates a total of 7,984 jobs in Limburg, including 5,223 directly. The gross value of UM (its employees, students and other aspects) amounts to €623 million annually, of which just over half stays in the Euregio.

## 04.

### UM: Top institute for the Netherlands in EU

Moreover, UM is increasingly developing into the independent, scientific think tank for the Netherlands in the European Union (EU). With Maastricht - birthplace of the EU treaty of the same name - the Netherlands is literally and figuratively close to Brussels. UM has an extensive network which highlights its growing importance in this regard.

UM now has over 24,000 international alumni, over 6,000 of whom work in the Euregion and over 9,000 of whom work within a 100-kilometre radius of Maastricht, including Brussels. This network is invaluable for Limburg and the Netherlands.

Together with partners in the region, UM is increasingly managing to bind international students to the area after their studies. In the future, this additional, highly educated workforce is badly needed in a region that is also struggling with an ageing population and the loss of many low-value industrial activities. In this situation, it is of utmost importance for Limburg, and thus for the Netherlands, to spark new economic activity. UM succeeds in this together with the regional business community and the province on the aforementioned Brightlands campuses.

# 05.

## UM: Strategy for mission and profile

Based on its Strategic Plan 2022-2026, UM is working to fulfil its profile as ‘the European university of the Netherlands’. It does so as a living lab and centre of expertise, with an international learning experience and environment, the International Classroom (ICR), international networks and partnerships, exchange programmes, focus on cross-border mobility and an excellent quality assurance system.

From this strategy, UM is in good faith developing as a university with a distinctly international and European profile. It is doing so partly in line with the advice of the *Committee on the Future-proof Higher Education System*<sup>5</sup> adopted by the Dutch government.

In its advice, the committee chaired by Dr C.P. (Cees) Veerman argued for clearer choices and sharper differentiation in the missions and profiles of institutions, and thus for ‘a multicoloured system’. The committee suggested that ‘the government should encourage institutions to do this’ and recommended that institutions should base themselves ‘on one or more of the dimensions as used in the European classification’, including regional involvement and international orientation.

In its advice, the Veerman Committee pointed to the international competitiveness of the Netherlands: ‘The globalisation of the economy requires a more international orientation of higher education.’ It called internationalisation ‘an inseparable part’ of ‘any form of higher education’. Furthermore, it stated that: ‘Students must be equipped to act in an international environment. (...) This requires institutions to adopt an active internationalisation policy.’

The report *The System on Edge*<sup>6</sup> by the Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (AWTI) concludes that higher education in the Netherlands is not future-proof and recommends, among other things, broadening the options for admission. The council links this advice to more specialisation (i.e., more defined profiles) among the institutions.<sup>7</sup>

5. Differentiating in triplicate: for the sake of quality and diversity in higher education’, April 2010  
<https://wp.asva.nl/asva/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/adv-cie-toekomstbestendig-ho.pdf>
6. Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation: ‘The system on edge - towards future-proof higher education and research’ (June 2019)
7. ‘Selection at the gate’ could take place on the basis of additional criteria compared to the final exam in secondary education that ‘fit into the educational concept of the programme’ (p. 51), according to the report.

# 06.

## UM: Internationalisation for quality

At UM, its European and international profile is reflected in a broad education offering. For example, as an education and expertise centre, the university focuses on themes that play a role in European and international border regions. UM further expands this profile in its education and research with programmes such as European Studies, European Public Health, European Law School and the Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM) institute.

Additionally, UM collaborates in the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance to develop and implement the first models for a European university. The European Commission authorised YUFE to implement its plan in early 2022, and UM is coordinating this ambitious project. The university also includes the UM Campus Brussels and various European-focused centres of expertise, such as the Institute for Transnational and Euregional Mobility (ITEM) and Maastricht Working on Europe (MWOE). UM maintains a sharp quality framework for all its internationalisation.

For UM, internationalisation enriches the quality of education and the degree obtained, partly by examining major societal issues from different viewpoints, backgrounds and cultures in an international context. UM teaches students to break down cultural barriers and learn to deal with different value patterns and perspectives. UM's distinctive education system therefore requires students to adopt an active and open attitude.

In the combination of the International Classroom and the unique educational concept of Problem-Based Learning (PBL), students from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities actively work on assignments in small groups with a maximum of 10-14 students.<sup>8</sup> In this way, students are well equipped for the future labour market.

UM also invests with students in projects and initiatives that make an important societal contribution to its home city of Maastricht and the Limburg region. It does this in strategic partnerships with public and private partners.

8. The small scale of PBL means that you cannot endlessly scale up the scale of this education. The teaching concept is relatively labour-intensive. Running the teaching groups requires a lot of staff. Also, the number of suitable rooms for this purpose is limited. This may be different at more traditional universities that still work a lot with lectures.

# 07.

## UM: Bilingual university

*Universiteit Maastricht* or Maastricht University; it is and remains a bilingual university. It provides education in English and also in Dutch. Both languages are also the official languages of communication at the university. Bilingualism is a crucial means for communication and cooperation and also for acquiring, sharing and developing knowledge. UM also sees this as a basis for intercultural understanding and working in an international, multilingual professional environment. More and more employers are also asking Dutch employees for this.

When determining the language in which the university offers a programme (UM has a total of 24 bachelor's programmes) it uses the following criteria: language proficiency for the relevant labour market, language of instruction for quality and academic training, educational vision and ICR, as well as attracting international talent.

The Dutch law programme is in Dutch; medicine is predominantly as well. In some programmes, such as Psychology, students can choose to study in Dutch or English. Literature used can be in English, also in Dutch programmes. Of the bachelor's programmes, more than 80% are in English.

UM has minimum English admission requirements for students and minimum English and Dutch requirements for its staff. It supports this policy by offering language courses, including a compulsory language course for teachers who do not yet meet the requirements. About 40% of the staff come from abroad.

The university offers Dutch courses for foreign students. This can also increase the chances of foreign graduates staying in Limburg and the Netherlands. The UM Language Centre offers free *Social Dutch* courses and *Better Writing in Dutch* workshops. A course in academic writing in Dutch is under development for bachelor's and master's students. A course in Dutch at B2 level is in preparation for non-Dutch-speaking students and staff.



# 08.

## CPB: International students contribute to Netherlands' prosperity

The Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB), in its memo 'The economic effects of internationalisation in higher education' carried out at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (18 April 2012), provides the following rationale: 'All things considered, it seems highly plausible that the current international student populations contribute to prosperity in the Netherlands. Besides the predominantly positive effects of student mobility internationally, the Netherlands has a high-quality intake and the students very likely contribute positively to public finances'.<sup>9</sup>

In its later note on this topic (September 2019), CPB concludes:

- 'The contribution from non-EEA students is even larger because they pay the institutional tuition fee (there is no government contribution and no student grants available for these students) and they are more likely to stay in the Netherlands.<sup>10</sup> EEA students are equal to Dutch students before the law, and so are the state contributions per student to universities.
- Among university graduates, those in the fields of natural sciences, engineering and education are most often still in the Netherlands after five years.'

9. Notes from the CPB (dated 18 April 2012, September 2019) call a positive contribution of international student flows for Dutch public finances 'very plausible' but are uncertain about its size.

10. 'The economic effects of internationalisation in higher and vocational education' | CPB Note, September 2019

# 09.

## UM: Growing number of students from the Netherlands

UM's international orientation enabled its growth from 6,000 students to a full-fledged academic community of currently about 22,000 students; 43% of whom come from the Netherlands, 19% from Germany and 8% from Belgium. Of the remaining students, 22% come from the EEA (mainly from France, Spain and Italy) and 8% from outside the EEA.

In student recruitment, Dutch young people are a very important group to UM. The number of students from the Netherlands has increased significantly; from 7,908 in 2017 to 9,612 in 2021. Due to its international orientation, UM strives for a good distribution of nationalities. UM sees no displacement of Dutch students from its programmes by foreign students. Growth for growth's sake, incidentally, is not a goal for UM. It is committed to further development along content lines.

# 10.

## UM: Restraint with fixus

UM currently restricts student admissions (numerus fixus) in only three programmes: Psychology, International Business and Medicine. Global Studies, University College Maastricht, University College Venlo and Maastricht Science Programme apply selection-based admissions on the grounds they offer small-scale and intensive education and fall under the so-called *typical colleges* Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs (CROHO) code.

As study programmes in English are also attractive to many Dutch students, a general numerus fixus on English-language programmes is often not favourable to Dutch students. A more specific numerus fixus for non-EEA students is less relevant for UM because of their structurally limited population (less than 10% of the intake). However, a sharp reduction of non-EEA students would be unfavourable to the diversity of the student population that enriches education and student development.

# 11.

## UM and the city of Maastricht: housing for students

Despite substantial growth in the student population, the shortage of student rooms in Maastricht has been limited in recent years. Together with the university, the city of Maastricht is responding to the need for student accommodation. A separate student housing programme directed by the municipality is the guiding principle for the future realisation of living spaces for students. This programme already provides sufficient housing. Last year, there seemed to be a limited shortage. UM pointed this out to prospective students and specifically advised them not to come to Maastricht until accommodation had been arranged.

# 12.

## Incorporate principle of customisation in possible new laws and regulations

In short, Maastricht University is vital as a socio-economic powerhouse for the people living and working in and around the province of Limburg. Many thousands of young people from the Netherlands and abroad study at UM. Without doubt, international students contribute to the prosperous development of UM and to the socio-economic development of the region, both of which have so-called home markets which are simultaneously domestic and international.

The imposition of generic laws and regulations may seriously and completely unnecessarily harm UM and its mission in society. UM therefore calls on the government and parliament for customisation.

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