

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' COUNCIL

By Caroline Osoro.

Picture this: A student at the school cafeteria walking about and not sure what to choose for lunch... Another at the bus stop trying to figure out the bus timetable.... And even another at the market/supermarket confused as to what detergent to buy for their laundry. These are some of the challenges faced by the international students. 12% of all Hasselt University students are international and come from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America. They are far from home and most do not speak Dutch which makes life even more difficult.

The International Students' council, launched in 2014, is a network for student participation by international students. It falls under STURA and is open to all international students who are enrolled as a degree/exchange student for at least 20 credits at Hasselt University/tUL and who cannot speak or write the Dutch language on a sufficient level to take part in meetings and discussions in this language. The international council represents and defends the interests of each international student.

While membership is open to all international students, there are elected posts within the council with a 1 year term of office ending 30th June. Current office bearers are: Caroline Osoro (Chairperson), Saud Khan (Vice Chairperson) and Mohammed Sali Dauda (Secretary). The council organizes at least one meeting a trimester and a representative from the International office participates. Reports are submitted to STURA for further action.

The council in collaboration with Michelle Bervoets (a former trainee at the International office) has developed a detailed welcome and guidance brochure for International students. Areas covered are: Public transportation and traffic, Health Insurance, Healthcare, Savings and budget, Leisure and culture and important vocabulary translation. There has also been a push to have the food items in the cafeteria labelled in English and provide halal menu options for the Muslim students. Moreover, the council is working closely with the international office to find student jobs for international students.

The council seeks to network with other university organizations. Currently, there is collaboration with the International Platform in areas such as organizing cultural events and Dutch classes for students. It cannot be overemphasized that the success of the council is pegged on international student participation as their presence guarantees that their individual challenges are addressed. One can choose to attend the meetings or receive the reports by simply sending an email to: internationalcouncil@uhasselt.be.

I am an international student from Nairobi, Kenya which is 10275km away. It is the land of long distance athletes and many wild animals. Apart from the freezing temperatures and language barrier, Hasselt is slowly beginning to feel like home. I have a background in Medicine and undertaking a Biostatistics master has been quite a challenge, but one I warmly welcome. To relieve stress, I have come to discover and love bowling and karaoke. Why did I choose to study in Belgium? Simple, Divock Origi and warm waffles.