

Management summary

In the past year, the National Commission conducted two partial investigations in the context of Chapter 2 of the Code of Conduct concerning the provision of information to international students. The Commission thinks it is valuable that international students receive full, up-to-date and adequate information before coming to the Netherlands for studying. In its first partial investigation, the Commission examined how the educational institutes inform international students about their study programmes and how the information in the various public registers mutually corresponds. In the second partial investigation, the Commission examined how the institutes inform students about the quality and accreditation of their study programmes on their own websites, and which information is given in the various public registers.

In both investigations, the Commission limited itself to examining twelve educational institutes: three members per umbrella organization and three educational institutes that are no member of an umbrella. The following public registers were consulted: the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO), the databases of the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and the course selectors Studiekeuze123 and Studyfinder. The conclusions of the Commission of each investigation are listed below.

Conclusions report educational offer 2017

In Article 2.1 of the Code of Conduct, the institutes obliged themselves to provide international students with full, up-to-date and easily accessible information about their study programmes. The investigation showed that educational institutes communicate through various channels with international students to provide them with information. In the case of digital information, the website of the institute comes first. The - prospective - student may also be informed about the educational offer through other databases.

Definition educational offer

The most important conclusion is that what is meant by an educational offer is not exactly clear. The educational offer shown in the various public registers and on the institutes' websites does not correspond. The underlying cause may be that no clear-cut definition is used for what is meant by educational offer to international students. Furthermore, the same programme can be listed under different names, which may confuse the student. On the website of an institute, for instance, a programme presents information about several specializations, whereas in Studyfinder these specializations are listed as study programmes. It is advisable that the educational institutes clearly indicate what they offer, that they include the registration number of the Dutch Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO) and that they tell which degree can be obtained. At the moment this is not or insufficiently clear.

Websites educational institutes and public registers

For the international student, the website of the educational institutes is a main source of information that can be consulted from a distance. If students plan to come and have to make a choice for an educational institute or study programme, full and accurate information should be available. Searching the institutes' websites is not always an easy task. The educational offer is not always listed on one single web page. Sometimes the web pages of several institutes or departments of an institute must be searched, or the required information can only be found at a deeper level of the website. This is not desirable for the student nor for the educational institute. The institute too will benefit from easy access to its educational offer on its website.

The investigation searched for information in the CROHO, the database of the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), and the course selectors Studiekeuze123 and Studyfinder. Each database uses - to a degree - other criteria to include

an educational offer or not. This correlates with the lack of a shared definition of what is meant by the educational offer.

Moreover, these databases use different names for many educational institutes and state different numbers of programmes. It is notable that the total number of programmes offered in these sources varies greatly. The Commission further saw that this differs per educational institute. There are also institutes of which the offer is practically equal in the various public sources.

Studyfinder is the only one of the public databases that were reviewed that has international students as its primary target group. It aims to inform students about the educational offer. The register has been set up as part of the 'Study in Holland' scheme, which promotes Dutch education abroad. The homepage of Studyfinder says: "This is the only database in Holland that offers a complete, independent and up-to-date overview of all programmes taught in English or other foreign languages in Holland". This phrase gives rise to the expectation that the database contains the complete educational offer for international students. However, the investigation of the Commission proved that the content of the database did not fully correspond with other registers that were examined. Neyenrode, for instance, states on its website that it offers fourteen English language programmes, but only four can be found in Studyfinder. It is up to the educational institutes themselves to register their programmes in the database. The Commission would like to remark that the sentence on Studyfinder may lead to confusion with international students.

Conclusions report accreditation educational offer 2017

The Commission considers it relevant that students are properly informed about the quality of the educational offer, the value of the degree and the possibilities of legalization. In that respect, Article 2.1a of the Code of Conduct requires the educational institute to inform the student clearly about the accreditation of its study programmes. The Commission concludes in its report that the institutes deal with the information on this subject in a variety of ways. It ranges from an extensive explanation about accreditation, inclusion of the CROHO number and a link to the underlying accreditation report, to a lack of information on the subject. The institutes themselves have to provide this information to these public registers, which does not always result in complete information.

Websites of the institutes

The information given on the website of an institute is most likely to be searched by international students first. The Commission detected that the information given about the quality and accreditation of the educational offer varies per institute. For some of the institutes that were examined, the information was not only difficult to find, but also limited. As a result, it is not clear for the student what accreditation entails, whether the programme has been accredited and if so, by which organization. The Commission also visited several websites that can be regarded as 'best practice', such as the Erasmus University Rotterdam website. The information on this site is quite complete, it explains what accreditation is, whether a programme has been accredited and by which organization. In some cases it includes a link to the underlying accreditation report and mentions the CROHO number.

Public registers

The educational institutes have to upload or submit - all - information to the databases of Studyfinder and Studiekeuze123 themselves. When registering a study programme in Studyfinder the institute can include information of its accreditation status. However, the investigation shows that this is not often the case and that Studyfinder does not check the information given by the institutes. The database of Studiekeuze123 is filled by study programme data from CROHO, which means that the programmes included have been accredited by the NVAO. The institutes may add further information. The disadvantage is that this database is only available in the Dutch language and does not aim at international students. The same applies to the CROHO, this database is a rather business-like register instead of meant to inform - international - students.

Accreditation organizations

The investigation showed that the twelve educational institutes selected use thirty different accreditation organizations, the main one being the NVAO. The principle of the Code of Conduct (Article 5.2) is that accreditation will be performed by the NVAO.

In deviation of this principle, accreditation by a foreign organization is also possible. In that case it should be *a study programme based on the legislation of another country* (1), which is *accredited by an accreditation organization higher education* (2), and of which the *decisions are being recognized by the corresponding government* (3). It is unknown whether the other accreditation organizations meet the requirements, but the Commission would like to remark that in a previous investigation into the actions of an educational institute based on an external advice, it concluded that the accreditation by at least one of the thirty accreditation organizations did not meet the requirements of Article 5.2.

Follow-up

The Commission will use these findings to consult with the umbrella organizations of higher education to emphasize the importance of full and unambiguous information. The information included in the website of the educational institutes and the various databases should not only be complete, but should correspond with each other. For that reason, it seems desirable to arrive at a shared definition of what is meant by the educational offer to international students. Furthermore, it is advisable to complete and harmonize the information, in both the registers and on the website, so that the international student can make use of full information. The Commission particularly asks to pay attention to unambiguous names of the study programmes offered.

Furthermore, the Commission will discuss with the umbrella organizations the significance of providing adequate information to international students in case a study programme has not been accredited by the NVAO. The consequences of the lack of such a quality test - and the related recognition by the Dutch government - can be huge. Without accreditation by the NVAO institutes may not award legally protected certificates or diplomas. Graduates from non-recognized programmes cannot use a title protected by law. It seems of great interest to explicitly inform students about this. For that reason, the Commission will talk with the umbrella organizations about the fact that the institutes use nearly thirty accrediting or quality assessing organizations in the Netherlands and abroad, other than the NVAO. The aim is to come to a joint conclusion to what extent the criteria of Article 5.2 of the Code of Conduct can be clarified and how a proper execution of these criteria by the institutes can be ensured.

As to its findings concerning Studyfinder, especially regarding the incomplete information given in the earlier quoted sentence from its website, the Commission will discuss this with the umbrella organizations and after that with EP-Nuffic. The Commission is of the opinion that the sentence on the website gives a different impression and may lead to confusion with international students about the educational offer. It will ask EP-Nuffic to revise the text so that it is more in line with reality and the expectations of international students.