

Extract periodic survey into the provision of information 2021

By signing the Code of Conduct for International Students in Higher Education (hereinafter 'Code of Conduct'), the educational institution has committed itself to providing adequate information to international students on, for example, the study programmes and services it offers. Given the duty of care incumbent on the institutions, the National Commission (hereinafter 'NC') – in consultation with the umbrella organizations the Universities of the Vereniging Hogescholen, the Universities of the Netherlands and the Dutch Council for Training and Education – believes it essential to conduct an annual survey of the extent to which the information provided by the signatories meets the standards set out in the Code. To this end, the NC analyses the provision of information to international students each year by assessing the websites of six educational institutions included in the Code of Conduct register. This year's analysis covered the information provided on the websites of Driestar University of Applied Sciences, Inholland University of Applied Sciences, Eindhoven University of Technology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Global School for Entrepreneurship, and Webster University. In order to achieve an objective assessment, the provision of information was assessed with reference to a predetermined framework. The provision of information about Covid-19 was also assessed in the same way. Although the obligation to provide clear information about Covid-19 is not explicitly mentioned in the Code of Conduct, the NC regards adequate information on this issue as essential for international students and part of each institution's duty of care towards the student.

The analysis has resulted in various recommendations and the identification of a number of best practices. All of the institutes surveyed were given the opportunity to respond to the findings. Driestar University of Applied Sciences, Inholland University of Applied Sciences and Webster University availed themselves of this opportunity. This process resulted in adjustments to their websites on the one hand and amendments to the report on the other hand. The NC greatly appreciates the institutions' readiness to implement the report's recommendations in the short term. The findings, recommendations, and best practices for the following topics are presented below: basic information, education and accreditation, services and Covid-19.

Basic information

The English-language information on all websites proved to be reliable. As a rule, the information is also easy to access. However, it turned out that hyperlinks – both internal links to other parts of the same website and external links to other websites – do not always function properly. The NC therefore recommends that educational institutions check their websites regularly to address this issue. Not all of the websites provide information – or sufficiently clear information – about the institution's internal complaints handling procedure and the Code of Conduct. As a result, international students may be left completely in the dark about these important issues. The purpose of and the need for the Code of Conduct is therefore not always clear to international students. The NC recommends that information on the institution's internal complaints handling procedure and the Code of Conduct should be clearly posted on the website. The websites of Driestar and Eindhoven University of Technology provide good examples of how the Code of Conduct can be presented. All of the institutions clearly communicate the nature of their educational institution or the nature of the education they provide. All Dutch educational institutions also explain, to a greater or lesser extent, the difference between a Dutch university of applied sciences and a Dutch university. This makes it clear to the international student which type of education they can expect to receive.

Education and accreditation

All educational institutions provide online information on the study programmes they offer international students. However, the survey revealed a lack of clarity in the naming of certain programmes. Different names are sometimes used to refer to the same programme. There is also a disparity between the programmes shown on the websites of the educational institutions themselves and those presented on the Study in Holland website, a general source of online information about studying in the Netherlands. The educational institution is responsible for providing the information presented on Study in Holland. To avoid confusion, the NC recommends that the institutions should ensure consistency in the range of study programmes offered and the system of nomenclature used, including the programmes as presented on the Study in Holland page. The survey showed that all Dutch educational institutions provide accredited education as stipulated by the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). One institution only offers programmes that are accredited by an accreditation organization in the higher education sector and whose decisions are recognized by the relevant government body and included in the non-exhaustive list. However, the accreditation status of the institution and/or the specific programme is not made sufficiently clear on all websites, despite the fact that clarity on this matter is of great importance to international students: after all, the status of the degree they obtain and the authorities' willingness to recognize that degree will largely determine their future prospects. The NC recommends that the accreditation status of both the institution and the study programme be clearly indicated. The report cites the way in which Inholland displays its accreditation status as a best practice.

Services

Initially, the survey seemed to show that the larger educational institutions generally offered information on more topics and more extensive information per topic than the smaller institutions. This was particularly noticeable in the level of information on services as stipulated in the Code of Conduct, including assistance with applying for a visa and residence permit, finding accommodation, offering introductory activities, and guidance on obtaining insurance, registering with the municipality and opening a bank account. However, the responses received from smaller educational institutions revealed that these institutions are more likely to offer tailor-made information, something they are able to do because they enrol fewer international students. Since the initial report, these institutions have adapted the information on their websites and now provide clear and complete online details of what they offer in this area. The NC makes two recommendations with regard to completeness of disclosure. First, related information should be clustered to make it easier for international students to find out everything they need to know about a particular topic. Second, the information offered should encompass all relevant aspects of the services stipulated in the Code of Conduct, and not only a selection of topics. This approach will ensure that international students are well prepared for their arrival in the Netherlands and at the educational institution and study programme of their choice. It is therefore very important that international students are given clear, complete and unambiguous information. The use of thematic tiles and a step-by-step plan are indicated as best practices. These methods bring information together at a central point and ensure that students know what to expect. The websites of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Eindhoven University of Technology feature fine examples of this approach.

Covid-19

Last but certainly not least, the survey found that not all educational institutions offer international students online information about Covid-19. The NC strongly recommends that educational institutions respond fully and responsibly to exceptional circumstances, such as those arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. The report cites the provision of a range of scenarios by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the creation of a coronavirus roadmap by Eindhoven University of Technology as best practices.

The report (in Dutch) is published on the website www.internationalstudy.nl and will also be sent to all institutions included in the Code of Conduct register. The NC hopes that the report will encourage educational institutions to take a critical look at their own websites and put the above recommendations into practice.