

# Short version of the periodic survey into the provision of information 2022

## Introduction

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 Code of Conduct Committee – in consultation with the umbrella organizations the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Association of Universities in 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 National Code of Conduct Committee 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 the Committee analysed the provision of information on the websites of Aeres, The Hague School of Hotel Management, University of Groningen, Leiden University, Team Academy Nederland and IHE Delft Institute for Water Education. In order to achieve an objective assessment, the provision of information was assessed with reference to a predetermined framework. Each year a topic is selected to be looked at in greater detail. In addition to a simpler check on how to find the complaints handling procedure, this year's topic for further scrutiny is the provision of information on housing, prompted by the current housing situation for students and the very tight housing market in the Netherlands at this time. This analysis (desk study) was conducted in July and August 2022.

### Assessment framework and research questions

In previous years, an assessment framework was drawn up which was used this year also. The framework is based on articles 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 5.2 and 5.4 of the 2017 Code of Conduct and in particular targeted towards the following fixed subjects: *curriculum - accreditation of the curriculum - mention of Code of Conduct - name of educational institution - services*. In the summer of 2022 (the period in which this survey was conducted), the five-yearly evaluation of the Code of Conduct neared its completion. For that reason, some aspects of the 2022 Code of Conduct were included in the survey of the provision of information, naturally with the proviso that this Code was not yet in effect at the time of the survey.

The Education Inspectorate issued a factsheet<sup>1</sup> in March 2022 on the experiences of students in funded higher education with the complaints handling procedure of their degree programme. This factsheet shows that students are poorly acquainted with the complaints handling procedures. Therefore, this year the survey focuses on how well the available information about complaints handling procedures can be found.

#### *Topic for further scrutiny*

Each year a topic is selected for further scrutiny which at the time is relevant to international students. Over the past academic year, housing for international students has been the subject of attention in the political arena and beyond. In March 2022, two surveys were published that looked

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<sup>1</sup> See the factsheet: [Student Factsheet about the complaints handling procedure in higher education | Thematic report | Netherlands Inspectorate of Education \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#).

into international student housing. The Dutch student union conducted a survey<sup>2</sup> into the best student city in the Netherlands and Nuffic assessed<sup>3</sup> the welfare and wellbeing of international students with housing as its main topic. Both reports show that housing is still a relevant theme requiring attention. This year's survey looks more broadly at the housing information provided to international students. That is not only apparent from the assessment framework but also from the follow-up survey questions defined as a result.

### Overview of survey questions

The 2017 Code of Conduct assessment framework, the outlook for several provisions in the 2022 Code of Conduct and the topic for further scrutiny (housing) resulted in the following set of questions:

#### Survey questions related to the 2017 Code of Conduct.

In relation to provision 2 Information provision:

- a. 2.1 Is the range of programmes for international students listed on the website?
- b. 2.1 Is the information on the website reliable and easy to access?
- c. 2.1a Does the website list the accreditation status of the degree programmes, as referred to in Article 5.2?
- d. 2.1g Does the website contain information about the Code of Conduct and the complaints handling procedure?
- e. 2.2 Does the website have a separate English-language section or a page dedicated to international students?
- f. 2.3 Does the English name of the educational institution make clear what the nature of the institution is?

In relation to provision 5 Range of programmes and guidance for international students:

- g. 5.2 Are international students only offered duly accredited degree programmes as defined by the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act?
- h. 5.2 Are the programmes offered to international students that are based on the legislation of other countries, accredited in those countries following a substantive assessment of the Dutch institution or of the education provided in the Netherlands 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?
- i. 5.4 Does the website clearly show if, and if so, which services are offered at which cost to international students in the context of obtaining:
  - o visa and residence permit;
  - o accommodation;
  - o introduction;
  - o support, including with insurance, registering with the municipality, opening a bank account).

#### Additional questions looking ahead to the 2022 Code of Conduct

- j. 2.1b Is there a description of the degree programme, the certificate that can be obtained and the legal status of that certificate, as well as the education and examination regulations?
- k. 2.1c Does the website list the admission requirements, including the procedures for admission and enrolment and the associated costs (as referred to in sections 3, 4 and 5)?
- l. 2.1 d Is it clear in what language the programme is offered?
- m. 2.1e Is there a clear indication of the costs the educational institution requires the students to pay for the above or for the services referred to in sections 3, 4, 5 and 6, i.e.:
  - o visa and residence permit;
  - o accommodation;
  - o introduction;

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to the survey: [Beste Studentenkamerstad 2021 v.1.docx \(Isvb.nl\)](#) (Dutch only).

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the survey: [How is it going with international students at Dutch higher education institutions? A report on study experience and well-being \(nuffic.nl\)](#).

- o support, including with insurance, registering with the municipality, opening a bank account).

#### Follow-up survey questions 2022 theme – housing

- a. Is housing information available in English?
- b. Is that information geared towards international students?
- c. Does that information explain that the housing market is tight?
- d. Is it clear what the consequences of a tight housing market are?
- e. Does the information explain what the consequences are for students if they are unable to arrange accommodation?
- f. Is there a link to a central web page on housing?

### Reader's guide

This year the decision was taken to start the report with a list of the conclusions, best practices and recommendations following from the analyses conducted. That is because the approach taken and results found are largely in line with the approach and results of preceding years. The conclusions, best practices and recommendations presented in this report serve as encouragement to the reader. The National Code of Conduct Committee hopes that the representatives of all educational institutions will use these conclusions, best practices and recommendations to take a critical look at their own website.

The details of how this survey was conducted are probably more relevant to the representatives of the educational institutions assessed and for that reason the information about the survey and the results per educational institution have been moved to the appendices <sup>4</sup>. The structure of the survey including the framework and the follow-up questions can be found in Appendix I. Appendix II lists the results of the analysis per educational institution. The details of the assessment framework can be found in Appendix III.

## Conclusions, best practices and recommendations

### Conclusions: 2017 Code of Conduct

#### *Range of programmes – reliable - accessible*

The websites analysed for this survey all offer information about the range of programmes and the full range of programmes can be found easily. All websites have an English-language version, two of the six educational institutions surveyed have a website in English only. Of the four institutions offering information in two languages, the Dutch-language and English-language websites broadly appear to provide similar information.

The way in which the range of programmes is presented and how further information can be found differs per educational institution. In general, that information is clear and well structured, so that visitors to the website can easily find information about the programmes. On occasion that information is harder to find and in that case the website visitor will have to make more of an effort.

Because all the institutions present their information in English, or in English as well, international students can gain a good picture of the range of programmes. That said, it is not always clear at first glance whether the entire range of programmes on the English website is also open to international students.

The following stood out when the information about the curriculum on the institutions' websites was compared with that on Study in NL, the website of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that the appendices are only available in the Dutch version.

and Flanders (NVAO) and in the CROHO. The information given by those educational institutions is in part exactly the same as the information in the three other sources. Naturally, that creates trust in the curriculum offered by the educational institutions. However, for some information there is some to a great deal of discrepancy between the information found on the various websites and/or in the CROHO. Lastly, part of the programmes as described in English by the institutions cannot be found at all in one or more of the other sources. The main causes appear to be the use of another name for the degree programme in a different language (in Dutch or English) or in the same language (English) or the use of 'unofficial' names to refer to the degree programme on the institution's website.

#### *Accreditation status*

All the websites of the examined educational institutions provide information about accreditation. In any event, that includes the accreditation by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). In a few cases other 'sector-relevant institutions' are listed. Although all the websites mention the NVAO, the information differs widely from the mere phrase 'all study programmes offered have been accredited by the NVAO' to a description of what the NVAO is (including a link to [nvaio.net](http://nvaio.net)). Too generic descriptions often fail to provide direction where it concerns the individual programmes. This is particularly the case for degree programmes that cannot be found on the NVAO website.

Sometimes the information about NVAO accreditation is presented in an inconspicuous position on the website, such as in the footer of the website. Luckily, the survey found many examples where the current accreditation status of specific degree programmes was clearly indicated along with the information about that specific programme. That information reassures international students of the status of the degree programme.

#### *Code of Conduct - complaints handling procedure*

All websites contain information about the Code of Conduct, which is a 100% score. Often a brief explanation is provided with a reference to the English-language section of the Code of Conduct website. Despite that good score, the information about the Code of Conduct is not directly visible. Finding the Code of Conduct often requires the search option.

Finding the internal complaints handling procedure for students was a great deal harder. We could only find the complaints regulations in two of the six cases; in three situations were described that could lead to a report of misconduct being made (such as inappropriate conduct, whistleblower). On the website of one educational institution, no information about complaints could be found at all. In general it can be said that complaints regulations are not awarded a prominent place on the websites. Furthermore, some complaints or reporting procedures appeared to relate to other people than students, for example to staff of the educational institution.

#### *Separate section - page dedicated to international students*

In 2022 all surveyed websites had a comprehensive English-language section. Most of that information is therefore accessible to anyone with an understanding of English. In addition, almost all websites have separate sections for international students, where they can find information about immigration and preparing for their stay in the Netherlands. There are some great examples of information grouped per theme (in addition to the curriculum) that is of interest to international students. Lastly, the websites usually distinguish information that is relevant to Dutch, EU and non-EU situations.

#### *Nature of the institution*

The nature of the institution cannot always be deduced immediately from the English name of the educational institution. In any case it is not always clear to those unfamiliar with the Dutch education system and corresponding terms in English, what the difference is between a *university / research university* or a *university of applied sciences*. Various institutions do explain the main differences

between higher professional and university education. The nature of the education provided becomes clear on all websites once the visitor looks beyond the name of the institution – the information about the curriculum in particular makes that clear.

#### *Accredited degree programmes - Higher education and scientific research act or foreign law*

The first sections above already provided some information about the information provision on the curriculum and accreditations. In most cases it is possible to find out which programmes offer degrees as defined by the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act, although it sometimes requires a bit of an effort.

As regards the information on the websites, none of the educational institutions surveyed this year appear to offer degree programmes based on foreign law. The only exception we found was the joint degrees on the website of IHE Delft, which clearly states that graduates of these programmes will obtain an International Master of Science degree.

#### *Services*

The amount and detail of the information provided about the services offered differs widely per educational institution. All the websites have some information, with or without links to external websites for further information. Most fail to list the amount of the service costs to be paid to the educational institution, with the exception of a few specific services. Based on the analyses conducted, our general impression is that educational institutions offer few to no services at all, in which case it is understandable that there is little information to be found.

Apart from the question which services the institution provides to students, some websites have clear themed blocks with all sorts of useful, practical information, for example about opening a bank account, taking out health insurance and working in addition to studying. Furthermore, a number of websites have videos that convey all relevant information in a matter of minutes and sometimes with a document or checklist that can be downloaded. Most institutions offer a specific helpdesk in the form of an International Office for students to contact.

A remarkable aspect in the context of this survey, in particular where it concerns housing, is that two to three of the six institutions are able to offer accommodation to part of their target group. Their websites have some information about the costs involved for the prospective students.

### **Conclusions: 2022 Code of Conduct**

#### *Description*

Looking ahead to some provisions in the 2022 Code of Conduct, the websites of six of the surveyed institutions are a reason for optimism. Most sections of the Code of Conduct referred to in section 2.1.b can always be found. The websites often contain a concise summary of the programmes (for example in the form of Facts & Figures) as well as detailed descriptions including information about the degree, language etc. The education and examination regulations are mostly easy to find on the websites, and on a few occasions only are 'hidden' in the 'about us' section.

#### *Admission requirements - procedures - costs*

In every case, the admission procedure can be found under headings such as *Apply* and *Admission and application*. The apply button is not hard to find at all, in fact visitors browsing the website would be hard put to miss it. A click on the button will generally yield more information, for example about what steps to take, which documents to include and how much time the various steps will take. Information about admission and any other requirements is also easy to find in this way. Usually there is some sort of step-by-step plan.

The websites usually have excellent videos on these topics, so that students are extremely well-informed on what to do. However, the costs involved in the various sections is not always clear.

### *Language*

Four of the six surveyed websites clearly inform the visitor on the language in which the programme is taught. Where the other two are concerned, it seems obvious that this is in English, because the websites themselves are in English only. However, that is either not made explicit or the reference to the language policy is downright confusing.

### *Costs for services*

As reported in the analysis relating to the 2017 Code of Conduct, the websites provide little information about which services are offered by the institutions themselves and if any costs are involved.

## **Conclusions: Additional, follow-up survey questions**

### *Complaints handling procedure*

As indicated in the introductory section, this report focuses in more detail on the provision of information to students about the complaints handling procedure. That additional focus proves necessary because information about complaints handling is not immediately apparent to website visitors. Finding information about procedures generally requires extensive searching, sometimes using the search option. In a few cases no information was to be found at all, despite a thorough search.

### *Housing*

All educational institutions provide their information in English and so information about housing is accessible to English-speaking international students. Most, but not all, institutions offer information on their website sections for international students about the housing market and how that market works for Dutch and international students in the Netherlands. There are multiple references to all sorts of housing-related institutions and websites; some are general websites and other more specifically targeted to students or the local housing market.

However, the housing information on the institutions' websites fails to make clear how tight the Dutch housing market really is. The fact that finding accommodation is extremely difficult is hardly addressed. Although they use terms, such as challenging and tricky, that only hints at the issue.

One positive exception is University of Groningen's website, which has an *FAQ housing in Groningen* block prominently positioned on the home page. In addition to the general information to be found there, the questions and answers clearly show how long and hard the process of finding accommodation can be. A process that, according to the website, should not be underestimated and which in the worst-case scenario could mean discontinuing the degree programme. But even in the case of this positive exception, the question arises whether it wouldn't be wiser to display one of their recommendations in bold capitals on the homepage: 'Looking for accommodation in Groningen? Start searching by April at the latest!'

Another thing worth mentioning in this respect is that various institutions warn not so much of the difficult housing market but of illegal practices. The most common fraudulent practices are listed, as are references to websites with more information on tenant rights.

## **Best Practices**

We found some great examples of information communicated well on the six websites surveyed this year, which we highlight below.

### *Range of programmes – reliable - accessible*

On the Leiden University website, information about the total range of programmes is clearly displayed and easy to find. With just a couple of clicks, the programmes can be filtered, for example by language or degree (see illustration 8 on page 26). Furthermore, the information about the

Bachelor's programmes is highly reliable, because almost identical information can be found on the websites of NVAO and Study in NL, as well as in the CROHO.

#### *Accreditation status*

Leiden also has a best practice example of providing information on the accreditation status of degree programmes. Besides explaining in general terms what accreditation entails, Leiden University clearly indicates the accreditation status of each programme. Illustration 11 on page 27, for instance, shows how students of Ancient History will be awarded a legally accredited Master's degree in History and the title Master of Arts (MA) on completion of the programme.

#### *Code of Conduct - complaints handling procedure*

The Aeres website has a fine example of information collated logically: the overview of blocks on the page *Aeres UAS Codes of conduct and regulation* (illustration 1 on page 15). Once students have found this overview, they will find all sorts of useful information about codes of conduct, protocols, etc. in one place.

#### *Separate section - page dedicated to international students*

Various best practices can be listed for the *Separate section - page dedicated to international students*. For example, international students visiting Aeres' website are clearly directed to the international section in a number of places. University of Groningen also provides targeted information under the heading '*For international perspectives*' and '*Bachelor's international students*' (illustrations 3 and 4 on pages 21 and 22). Worth a mention also is the 'international students' section of the Leiden University website, which presents the most relevant themes such as education, application and preparing for a stay in the Netherlands in one clear overview. The themes grouped in blocks are presented in a fresh layout with photos and texts and clearly show students where to find which information (illustration 9 on page 26).

#### *Nature of the institution*

The English-language homepage of Team Academy clearly shows both the nature and the content of the institution. A completely different example is the video 'meet our students' on the IHE Delft website, which also makes clear to the viewer what the nature and content is of the education on offer. Differences between higher professional and university education are explained clearly and concisely on University of Groningen's website.

#### *Accredited degree programmes - Higher education and research act or foreign law*

Of the institutions surveyed this year, only IHE Delft Institute for Water Education offers degree programmes provided in collaboration with foreign universities. Those joint degree programmes clearly state that graduates will receive an International Master of Science. It should be noted that the underlying foreign law or accrediting authorities are not specified (illustration 17).

#### *Services*

The information provided about the services differs widely per educational institution. All websites have some information, with or without links to external websites for further information. Some websites offer well-grouped information such as how to open a bank account, take out health insurance, about working while studying and the average costs of living in the Netherlands. The universities of Groningen and Leiden provide overviews with that and similar information grouped together. A very nice example, in addition to the overview in blocks (illustration 12, page 28) is the video 'Prepare your stay' on the Leiden University website.

#### *2022 Code of Conduct - various topics*

Although the 2022 Code of Conduct was not yet in effect at the time of the survey, some checks were carried out with several provisions of this updated version of the Code of Conduct. That yielded some lovely examples of information clearly presented. For example, international students can easily find the curriculum on Aeres' website; key information is clear for each programme (degree,

language, costs, etc.) in addition to detailed information that can be downloaded as PDF. There are more websites that offer a concise summary of the programmes, for example in the form of Facts & figures, as well as detailed descriptions. In most cases the education and exam regulations could be found easily, although they were not always in a logical place. The website of The Hague School of Hotel Management offers Dutch and international students a lot of useful information in addition to Education and Exam Regulation under the heading Regulation and charters (illustration 2 on page 20).

Almost all websites offer short videos on a certain theme. Visitors to the Leiden University website, for example, are brought up to speed with a three-minute video of the do's and don'ts of admission and application. The info-graphic videos of the university of Groningen offer relevant, easy-to-absorb information. The videos on the website often come with more detailed information, for example a step-by-step plan that can be downloaded.

### *Housing*

Concerning housing, the only website that stands out in a positive sense is the University of Groningen website. Its English-language homepage prominently displays an information block *FAQ housing international students* (illustration 6 on page 24). The website provides a lot of useful information about housing and explicitly mentions and explains the problems around the extremely tight housing market.

A totally different service is the one provided by The Hague school of Hotel Management, Leiden university and IHE Delft – they are able to offer accommodation to specific groups of student, which is a welcome offer in these times.

## Recommendations

As regards findings and conclusions, the National Code of Conduct Committee makes the following recommendations in this 2022 survey:

- 1) **Make clear if the curriculum is accessible to international students and in which language the programme is taught.**  
Because the surveyed websites offer all information in English or only in English, the differences in the curriculum for Dutch and for international students are unclear. If all information is provided in English, the assumption is that all programmes are accessible to everyone, which is not always correct. An unambiguous indication of language and accessibility prevents misunderstandings.
- 2) **Be consistent in the name of the institution and curriculum.**  
A comparison of the curriculum (mainly Bachelor's and Master's programmes) as presented on the institutions' websites with that on the website of Study in NL, the NVAO and in CROHO shows that it is sometimes hard or impossible to find an institution or programme. If one name is used consistently – either in English or Dutch – it will vastly improve this problem. Visitors to the website will be inclined to consider the information more reliable if it is the same in different sources.
- 3) **Improve the current information about accreditation by clearly stating the accreditation status for each degree programme.**  
Many of the websites surveyed offer general information about accreditation and the NVAO. That is a good start, but the visitor still has no idea of the accreditation status of specific programmes. That can easily be remedied by listing the status clearly with each degree programme, perhaps using the ISAT number (accreditation code).
- 4) **Place the information relevant to international students in a logical, easy to find location on the website.**



That might seem a rather obvious recommendation: doesn't that apply to all relevant information? The answer to this is of course 'yes'. In the context of this survey, we specifically looked at the duty of care that the educational institutions have in providing information to international students, particularly for some topics that are especially relevant. In various cases the information could only be found by clicking through a number of times, for example to a footer or a section for staff. Luckily, we also found plenty of best practices that serve as example or encouragement.

5) **Put the complaints handling procedure for Dutch and international students on the website.**

The recommendation under 4 also applies to the complaints handling procedure. In one or two cases no information at all was to be found about complaints handling procedures.

6) **Provide information about the Dutch system of higher education (including degrees), in addition to information about the institution's own curriculum.**

Although all websites contain information about the curriculum on offer, it would be helpful to many visitors if the Dutch system of higher education including the degrees and titles are explained in more detail. That will make it easier to get an idea if a particular programme is the right one for the intended career prospects.

7) **Make clear if certain services can be supplied by the institution and what the costs are.**

The websites offer a great deal of information about all sorts of relevant, practical things. Often that information is grouped in themed blocks and easy to find. There are handy pointers, useful documents and many references to relevant institutions and websites. In many cases there is a helpdesk which students can contact. But, with a few exceptions, there is hardly any clarity about what services the institutions actually offer themselves. Perhaps most institutions do not offer any services, but this should be clearly indicated.

8) **Put clear information about housing and related issues in a prominent place on the website.**

All websites offer information about housing in the vicinity of the degree programme, sometimes with interesting tips and tourist attractions. But they almost appear to gloss over the fact that it is extremely difficult to find accommodation and that starting a degree programme in the Netherlands without having a place to stay can lead to major problems, a lot of stress and high costs. That information should jump off the screen, if only to protect international students.

### Follow-up

This report will be published on the website: [www.internationalstudy.nl](http://www.internationalstudy.nl) and sent to all institutions listed in the register of the Code of Conduct. The National Code of Conduct Committee hopes that the report will encourage educational institutions to take a critical look at their own websites, make appropriate use of their fellow institutions' best practices and put the above recommendations into practice.