

# Trends report on the provision of information

## Which topics have been investigated in the past five years?

The periodic investigations in recent years have almost always focused on the provision of information through the websites concerning:

- a. the available curricula and study programmes;
- b. accreditation;
- c. the Code of Conduct (including the application procedure) and the complaints procedures (of the educational institutions);
- d. housing;
- e. services.

## Which areas have shown a visible improvement?

Answering this question has involved looking at whether the provision of information has remained good down the years, or whether it has improved. This is the case with the following subjects:

- the use of the correct name in English, for the purpose of stating the nature of the type of education being given ('university', university of applied sciences');
- the provision of information about differences in HBO and WO education (higher professional and university, respectively);
- the inclusion of information about the Code of Conduct on the website, and of the Code of Conduct itself;
- the provision of information about, and references to, housing at a more easily accessible location, as well as information about dubious practices on the housing market;
- greater information about services in their broadest sense and references to the possibilities for contacting an International Office.

## Are there any areas relating to the provision of information that have clearly deteriorated?

No indications have been found in the investigations of any notable deterioration in the provision of information about certain topics.

## What topics, findings, and recommendations require further attention?

As the National Commission has noted, there are recommendations that recur on a yearly basis. This may also concern matters that have seen improvements down the years.

From the analysis of the investigations used for this trends report, the following topics have emerged that still (or again) require attention.

### **available curricula and study programmes**

- I. What exactly the range of curricula and study programmes entails is not always clear. From the perspective of international students, it is important that there be sufficient clarity regarding the following:
  - what the programmes involve and what they lead to;
  - whether the programmes are accredited by the NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) or by any other body (and which ones);
  - whether the programmes are HBO or WO;
  - what degree a particular study programme leads to.
- II. The information explaining the differences between HBO and WO education is not always correct.  
Students who are properly informed about how Dutch higher education is structured and about the differences between HBO and WO education are more likely to be able to decide

what the most suitable study programme is for them, in relation to their educational and career ambitions.

- III. There is sometimes confusion about the language in which study programmes are given. The fact that the name of a study programme is in English does not necessarily mean that every subject will be taught in English. State clearly the language or languages of instruction of programmes and courses.
- IV. There is a high level of inconsistency in the use of the names of study programmes. Differences occur in the following areas in particular:
  - o Dutch-language and English-language names;
  - o the names of study programmes used by educational institutions' own websites;
  - o the names of study programmes on various platforms (websites/registers, such as educational institutions' own websites, the NVAO, Study in NL, and the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO)).
- V. The use of all kinds of different names (sometimes of the same programmes) makes it difficult or impossible for students to find or identify study programmes on Study in NL or NVAO, for example. Students cannot verify that information provided by an educational institution is reliable.

#### **accreditation**

- VI. In many cases, it is not sufficiently clear what exactly accreditation mentioned on institutions' websites refers to. Does it apply to a study programme as a whole, or part of it, to a specific course, or just the English-language version? It is extremely important for students to have certainty about the accreditation of study programmes or a specific part of a programme, or specific course, for the purpose of having diplomas recognised.
- VII. In general terms, there is insufficient information on what 'accreditation' actually means. It is important that sufficient information is given about:
  - o what accreditation means, and what the NVAO, ISAT code, and the CROHO code stand for;
  - o what the consequences could be of taking a study programme that has not been accredited;
  - o what certain accreditations entail if they are not based on Dutch legislation.
- VIII. Many of the study programmes cannot be found on the NVAO or CROHO websites (see under V.).  
In such cases, students are unable to verify whether accreditations listed by institutions are correct.

#### **Code of Conduct and complaints procedure**

- IX. The information provided about the Code of Conduct has improved significantly in recent years. However, even more progress is possible in this area, especially by:
  - o keeping information about the Code of Conduct up to date;
  - o referring, on institutions' websites, not just to the Code of Conduct website, but also by posting a clear and understandable brief explanation about the Code of Conduct for international students;
  - o posting information where it can be found easily by students, for example alongside information about the internal complaints procedure of the educational institution in question;
- X. Various investigations (not just the periodic investigations carried out by the National Commission) have shown that even in 2022 the information provided about the educational institutions' complaints procedure is still below par.

### **housing**

- XI. The provision of information about housing has expanded over the years. In view of the current housing market situation, attention should be paid to:
- providing much clearer information about all relevant problems on the Dutch housing market (such as shortage, the extreme difficulty in finding somewhere to live, possible consequences of starting a course or programme while having no prospects of finding somewhere to live);
  - posting such information – if relevant for the region in question – much more prominently on the website.

### **services**

- XII. Information about services has become much more extensive over time. Generally, the most notable aspects that could be improved are:
- a great deal of information is made available (including references to external websites), but it is by no means clear what services institutions themselves provide or what they cost.

### **other topics**

As well as the topics mentioned above, which have been looked at in almost every investigation in the past five years, the following themes stood out during the trends analysis:

#### **A. Findability**

There is now much more information about a range of topics than was the case several years ago. The layout and structure of many websites have improved. Nonetheless, a frequently recurring recommendation is that findability and a logical clustering of topics could be improved.

#### **B. Exceptional circumstances**

In 2020 and 2021, considerable attention was of course paid to the provision of information about coronavirus. The lessons learned from these years can also be used for exceptional circumstances other than a pandemic. In summary, they are:

- a. be sure to provide comprehensive information about the circumstances;
- b. make sure the information is kept up to date;
- c. if possible, use national websites to refer to reliable and up-to-date information;
- d. or, if option c. is not available, set up a centralised English-language website to provide up-to-date information about the exceptional circumstances.

#### **C. Use of websites and other media**

In 2019, an investigation was carried out into the use of media other than the websites of educational institutions for the provision of information. Two key conclusions were:

- a. the obligation on educational institutions to provide information to international students (current and prospective) is carried out through their websites;
- b. social media serve a different purpose, often functioning as a showcase for the institution and as the first point of contact for students.

### **Proposal for follow-up action**

The trends report paints a picture of what has improved over the years and which topics require attention. These topics are familiar, as are the recommendations made in relation to them.

It is proposed that the areas for improvement mentioned above be brought to the attention of educational institutions in a constructive manner. A suitable response and an appropriate period for carrying it out will have to be decided for each topic, which can be put to the National Commission

in separate proposals. For example, in 2023 there will be a focus on the existence and findability of the 2022 Code of Conduct and internal complaints procedures via a check on the websites of all the educational institutions listed on the register. There will also be an exploration (quantitative and qualitative) of complaints made.

This trends report will help direct the spotlight at individual topics at regular intervals.