



# Code of Conduct international student higher education

Beleidsafdeling Juridische Zaken

Revised 1 september 2017

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## **Preamble**

### **Considering that**

Dutch higher education aims to further improve and strengthen international co-operation, and the Netherlands wishes to brand itself abroad as a knowledge society together with its higher education institutions;

The higher education institutions wish to attract talented international students and to establish a streamlined and co-ordinated guideline for the relation between international students and Dutch institutions using this Code of Conduct;

Within that framework, the higher education institutions wish to provide clear, accessible and unambiguous information on the quality of the study programme, their position within the Dutch system of higher education, the services and provisions offered to international students, the costs of study and living, as well as the admission requirements for international students;

The higher education institutions may only use the Dutch government's internationalisation policy instruments provided that the institution maintains a proper relationship with the international students and the Dutch government supports and provides relevant information through its offices abroad to higher education institutions that subscribe, implement and support this Code of Conduct;

The higher education institutions endorse the interest that international students are given the opportunity to learn the Dutch language and acquire cultural skills;

The Dutch government has decided that the signing of the Code of Conduct by the higher education institutions is a precondition for granting residence permits to non-nationals of the EU/EEA or Switzerland to study at the level of higher education;

By signing this code, the higher education institution is obliged to comply with the obligations set out in the Code of Conduct and to act in the spirit of the Code of Conduct with respect to matters not set out in the Code of Conduct;

In order to achieve the abovementioned objectives, further agreements should be made to have the Code of Conduct be supplementary to the existing legal framework. The existing legal framework includes at any rate Articles 7.28 of the Higher Education and Research Act (*WHW*) and 3.41 of the Aliens Decree 2000 (*Vreemdelingenbesluit*) and Chapter B3 of the Aliens Act Implementation Guidelines 2000 (*Vreemdelingencirculaire*).

**The higher education institutions have agreed to comply with the following lines of conduct and acts:**

## 1 Definitions

### *Admission to the study programme:*

The positive outcome of the evaluation by the higher education institution of at least preparatory education, language skills and diplomas of the international student who requests to be admitted and registered for a specific study programme.

### *Agent:*

An individual, company or other organisation that, provides services whether or not on a commercial basis, to prospective international students desiring to study in the Netherlands or that provide services to higher education institutions to recruit international students.

### *Code of Conduct:*

The current Code of Conduct for international students in higher education.

### *Education:*

All higher education - including the preparatory year and the premaster - that is offered to international students by or under the responsibility of the higher education institution.

### *Exchange student:*

An international student who continues, will continue or has continued his/her education at a higher education institution in the Netherlands in the context of a formal exchange program set up for a period of at least 3 months up to 12 months and who is not enrolled and graduated as a regular student.

### *International student:*

A student with a foreign nationality who, in case of a third-country national on the basis of a residence permit granted to this effect, desires to continue, continues or has continued his/her full time education at a higher education institution in the Netherlands.

### *National Commission:*

The commission as referred to in Section 7.

### *Higher education institution:*

An institution:

- subsidised, recognised or a corporation in accordance with the Higher Education and Research Act (*WHW*) and that
- provides higher education, accredited as referred to in Article 5.2, or
- subsidised within the framework of Article 2 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Grant) Framework Act (*Kaderwet subsidies Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Grant Regulations 2006 (*Subsidieregeling Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 2006*), and

that has signed this Code of Conduct and has been registered as a participating institution by the Register Administrator.

### *Parties concerned:*

The international student, the registered higher education institutions, the Dutch Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (*Vereniging Hogescholen*), the Dutch Council of Training and Education (*NRTO*) and the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (*VSNU*), as well as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (*BZ*), Education, Culture and Science (*OCW*), Economic Affairs (*EZ*) and Security and Justice (*VenJ*).

### *Premaster*

A specific program offered to international students in order to be admitted to the master program.

*Preparatory year:*

Preparatory education - including preparatory language education - lasting no more than one year, which is offered to international students by or under the responsibility of the higher education institution with the objective of admission to the regular study programme.

*Proportional nominal study load:*

The nominal study load for one academic year (registration period).

*Reference period:*

The period in which an admitted international student is registered at one and the same higher education institution.

*Register:*

The public Register of higher education institutions that have signed the Code of Conduct and that is maintained by the Register Administrator.

*Register Administrator:*

The Education Executive Agency (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*).

*Registration:*

The administrative action by the higher education institution upon the request of the admitted international student with the ensuing rights and obligations related to following educational programmes.

*Third-country nationals:*

International students from other countries than Switzerland or the Member States of the EU/EEA.

*Umbrella organisations:*

Vereniging Hogescholen, NRTO and VSNU.

## **2 Information provision**

- 2.1 The higher education institution provides, amongst others through the website, timely reliable and easily accessible information to international students concerning:
- a. the accreditation of the study programme as referred to in Article 5.2. In case the accreditation has been carried out by an organization other than the NVAO, international students will be informed about the consequences in respect of the recognition of the degree and the diploma by the Dutch government;
  - b. a description of the study programme and the certificate that will be obtained, and the examination regulations (or comparable regulations) or a summary thereof;
  - c. the admission requirements of the study programme, including policies for admission and registration and the associated costs as referred to in Section 3 and 4;
  - d. the language of teaching;
  - e. supplementary charges required by the higher education institution from the international student for the abovementioned services or for services as referred to in Sections 3, 4 and 5;
  - f. the standardization of the student progress as referred to in Section 5;
  - g. this Code of Conduct.

The abovementioned information preferably includes a description of the knowledge and skills that the international student will have acquired after having successfully completed the study programme.

- 2.2 The information provided by the higher education institution to international students based on this Code of Conduct is to be in English or in the language used in the study programme, or in the native language of the international student.
- 2.3 The higher education institution ensures that its advertising and presentations clearly indicate the nature of the higher education institution and its education programmes. When recruiting international students, it will act in accordance with the rules and standards laid down in the [Advertising Code](#) of the [Netherlands Advertising Code Commission](#) (Nederlandse Reclame Code Commissie), particularly [general code](#) (I) and the special [advertising code for courses](#) (II-b). The higher education institution uses a name in the English language that clearly reflects the nature of the institution.

### **3 Agents**

- 3.1 If the higher education institution commissions an agent to recruit international students, the higher education institution will ensure that the agent acts in the spirit of this Code of Conduct. The recruitment process can be contracted out partly or wholly, but the higher education institution remains responsible for the admission of international students.
- 3.2 The higher education institution will conclude a written agreement with anyone granted the competency as an agent to recruit international students and only hires agents who have extensive knowledge of the Dutch higher education system. The higher education institution will not hire agents of questionable integrity and honesty and ensures that its agent has access to current and adequate information of the educational programmes of the institution. The higher education institution immediately takes corrective measures if it becomes aware that an agent is behaving in a negligent, careless or incompetent manner, or is involved in false, misleading or unethical advertising and recruitment, including activities that can damage the good name of Dutch higher education. The higher education institution also regularly informs itself of the experiences of international students.
- 3.3 The international student pays the study costs and any admission fees to the higher education institution or, in case of joint or double degree programmes, to the designated (foreign) higher education institution.
- 3.4 If recruitment or broker costs are to be paid to the agent, the agreement between the higher education institution and the agent must set out who pays these costs to the agent.
- 3.5 The higher education institution will make arrangements with the agent concerning supervision of his acts. Upon request of the National Commission (see Section 7), the higher education institution provides the agreement with agents for inspection. The higher education institution sets out in the agreement with agents that the agreement can be provided to third parties for inspection.

### **4 Admission to and registration in the study programme**

- 4.1 An international student who applies for admission and registration with the higher education institution must demonstrate the required preparatory education, sufficient language skills (see Article 4.2), and diplomas required for admission to the specific study programme. The higher

education institution determines the preparatory education requirements prior to the recruitment of international students for the study programme in question and checks prior to admission whether the international student meets the requirements.

- 4.2 With respect to the education it offers to international students, the higher education institution determines the minimum language requirements that the international student must meet and makes sure that he/she actually meets these requirements.

For study programmes in Dutch, the provisions of Article 7.28, second paragraph WHW apply. For study programmes in English, a minimum of an academic IELTS test with an overall band score of at least 6.0 (six) for the B and M level is required.

For preparatory education with a length of 6 up to 12 months, as well as a premaster with a length of at least 6 months, a minimum requirement of 5.0 IELTS applies; for preparatory education or a premaster of 6 months or shorter, a minimum requirement of 5.5 IELTS is required.

For the scores of other accepted language tests than IELTS, the table below<sup>1</sup> applies:

IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC en Cambridge English grades & scale					
IELTS	TOEFL Paper	TOEFL Internet	TOEIC <sup>2</sup>		Cambridge English grades and scale
			Listening and Reading	Speaking and Writing	
7.5	625	113	790	400	Advanced (CAE) - Grade B (scale 194 - 199) Advanced (CAE) - Grade C (scale 191-193)
7.0	600	100	780	350	First (FCE) - Grade A (scale 185 and above) Advanced (CAE) - Grade C (scale 185 and above)
6.5	575	90	720	310	Advanced (CAE) - Grade C (scale 180- 184) First (FCE) - Grade A (scale 180 - 184) First (FCE) - Grade B (scale 176-179)
6.0	550	80	670	290	First (FCE) - Grade B (scale 173 - 175) First (FCE) - Grade C (scale 169 - 172)
5.5	525	70	620	260	First (FCE)- Grade C (scale 162-168)
5.0	500	60	600	240	First (FCE) - Grade C (scale 160-161) B1 level certificate (scale 154 - 159)

In case a higher education institution has reasonable doubt about the language test certificate and as a consequence about the international students English proficiency, the higher education institution may impose further requirements related to the English proficiency, in addition to the mandatory language test.

- 4.3 Contrary to the provisions of Article 4.2, a higher education institution may exempt international students who have had their preparatory education in English, from having to take a mandatory language test. This also applies for students with an International Baccalaureate Certificate for English A Language and Literature. The National Commission may request that the higher education institution provides a statement from the NUFFIC, confirming that the preparatory education has been followed in the English language. Furthermore, a higher education institution may exempt an international student from having to take a mandatory language test in case the student obtained a diploma of secondary

1 The table is not meant to mutually compare language tests and/or scores. It is only meant to formulate the minimum scores for the accepted language tests referred to for the admission of international students. No referencing has been made to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) because the CEFR is a framework with level indicators and not a language test. A CEFR level covers multiple scores of the language tests listed in the table. Therefore, there is no level indicator imposed but a minimum score on a language test.

2 For both elements applies that international students must satisfy the threshold values.

education in a country listed in the diploma list drawn up on behalf of the associations of institutions of higher education, as published on the website of the Code of Conduct.

In case of an exchange programme for a study in English as well as a joint, double or multiple degree program in English, in the agreement between the transmitting and receiving institution arrangements are made in respect of the minimum English level. The agreements must be consistent with the standards set out in Article 4.2, in which the mandatory language test only needs to be taken once. Upon request of the National Commission, the higher education institution provides the agreement with the transmitting institution for inspection.

The higher education institution for applied science programmes in the area of arts may refer to modified requirements for the level of English language skills. This concerns study programmes registered in the study programmes in the area of arts of the module Language and Culture in the CROHO. With respect to these study programmes, legal supplementary requirements (Article 7.26a WHW) apply, primarily in connection with the required artistic quality. These study programmes assess the English language skills within the framework of the selection process and students are therefore exempted from the obligation to take a language test as described in Article 4.2. In view of the special nature of these study programmes, the university board determines the desired language level and sets this out in the Education and Examinations Regulations.

- 4.4 If the international student either does not meet the requirements set out by the higher education institution, the higher education institution notifies the international student in writing providing a motivation of any refusal to admit and/or register the international student. The higher education institution also indicates any legal remedies that the international student can resort to with respect to the refusal.
- 4.5 The higher education institution may charge a fee for assessment of language skills, preparatory education, and diplomas. The higher education institution making the admission and/or registration to the study programme contingent on the successful completion of a preparatory year or a premaster, will ensure beforehand that the international student can be expected to successfully complete the preparatory year or the premaster.
- 4.6 As part of each registration process, the higher education institution requests the admissible third-country national to agree in writing with the procedure used by the higher education institution to report the third-country national to the IND (whether or not with prior notice), in case the registration is terminated or after having established that the third-country national has not made satisfactory student progress as referred to in Articles 5.5 and 5.6.

## **5 Offers to and assistance to international students**

- 5.1 The higher education institution meets the national legal requirements that apply to the institution.
- 5.2 The institution offers international students only duly accredited degree education, within the meaning of the WHW. Furthermore, education can be offered based on the law of other countries if it has been accredited, according to a substantive assessment of the Dutch institution or education offered in Netherlands, by an accreditation organization in the higher education area and the decisions of which are recognized by the relevant authorities in the country concerned. In order to assess this, external advice can be obtained by the Register Administrator or the National Commission.

Short term programmes at the level of higher education - not being a preparatory year or a premaster - may also be offered to international students, as long as they are reducible to accredited programmes which are offered by the same institution.

- 5.3 The higher education institution will ensure that teachers have sufficient command of the language in which the study programmes are being taught.
- 5.4 The higher education institution makes clear which services it provides to international students with respect to obtaining a visa and a residence permit, housing, introduction and assistance. In accordance with Article 2.1, the higher education institution clearly specifies in its information material which services it provides and what the associated costs are.
- 5.5 At the end of each academic year, the institution determines the annual student progress of the international student, except for the exchange student. Satisfactory student progress is considered: 50% (or more) of the proportional nominal study load for a full or partial academic year. Contrary to this, international students must successfully complete the preparatory year and the premaster.

In case of insufficient student progress, the institution will examine the cause, for instance by conducting a student's progress discussion with a student advisor.

In case the international student does not study at all, does not study enough or cannot handle the level, the IND is notified of the lack of progress of the third-country national within one month after establishing the fact. In case of personal circumstances as referred to in Article 7.51 WHW as well as in Article 2.1 of the WHW Implementation Decree, which can be regarded as valid reasons for unsatisfactory student progress, binding agreements are made with the international student so that the study can be completed in time. In such cases the IND will not be notified of the lack of progress of the third-country national.

Only one exception for not notifying the IND about the lack of progress of the third-country national as a result of the same personal circumstances will be made per reference period.

The institution records any unsatisfactory progress and any personal circumstances as well as, in case of a third-country national, the fact that the IND was not notified.

- 5.6 The IND will be informed as soon as the institution establishes the fact that a third-country national has terminated his/her registration at the institution.
- 5.7 The higher education institution is obliged to actually provide the study programme offered. If the study programme is cancelled for valid reasons, cancellation cannot take place after three months prior to the commencement of the study programme, with the exception of short term courses and customised programmes. If the international student is already in the Netherlands with the objective to follow this study programme, the higher education institution is obliged to find a suitable alternative in consultation with the international student, and to inform the international student which procedures must be followed to that effect.

## **6 *Register of participating higher education institutions and the tasks and authorities of the Register Administrator***

- 6.1 The higher education institution requests the Register Administrator for inclusion in the Register, and provides the signed Code of Conduct.

- 6.2 The Register Administrator publishes the Register on its website in Dutch and in English. The Rules and Regulations forming part of this Code of Conduct contain further provisions pertaining to the register .
- 6.3 Based on the information provided by the applicant, the Register Administrator decides within a month and informs the applicant in writing of the decision. The application is rejected, if the applicant does not meet the conditions and obligations as referred to in the Code of Conduct, including the accreditation of study programmes by accreditation organisations as referred to in Article 5.2. The application is also rejected if it is submitted before the period as referred to in Article 7.9 has passed.
- 6.4 A higher education institution may either be removed from the Register by the Register Administrator at its own request or by order of the National Commission in accordance with the provisions of Article 7.9. Removal by the Register Administrator also takes place in case an institution has ceased to exist.
- 6.5 The Register Administrator publishes addition to or removal from the Register of a higher education institution on its website, and notifies among others the IND and NUFFIC about it.
- 6.6 Without prejudice to the other tasks referred to in this Code of Conduct, the tasks of the register administrator consist of:
- a) registering complaints;
  - b) preparing annual reports for approval by the National Commission;
  - c) providing information to parties concerned.
- 6.7 Complaints concerning the Register Administrator can be submitted with the chair of the National Commission, after the internal complaint procedure of the register administrator has been completed.

## **7 National Commission**

- 7.1 The umbrella organisations will establish a National Commission and define the competences of this commission. The umbrella organisations appoint members to the National Commission for a term of office of four year. Members may be reappointed once. By publication on its website, the Register Administrator informs the parties concerned of the composition of the National Commission.
- 7.2 The National Commission is independent and consists of six members. The *VSNU* appoints two members and two substitute members, the *Vereniging Hogescholen* appoints two members and two substitute member and the *NRTO* appoints one member and one substitute member. The National Commission appoints a chair who is not a part of the circle of interested parties. For the term of office of the chair the provisions of Article 7.1 apply.
- Should any complaint relate to or originate from a higher education institution that has a member in the Commission, the member concerned steps down and is replaced by a substitute member from another higher education institution.
- 7.3 The task of the National Commission is to monitor compliance with the Code of Conduct and to assess the actions of the higher education institutions in the light of the Code of Conduct. The commission does so by, among other things, dealing with petitions that may be submitted based on the Code of Conduct in accordance with the procedure as described in Section 4 of the Rules and Regulations. The National Commission can also initiate investigations about the way an institution acts or has acted within the framework of the Code of Conduct.

- 7.4 After consulting with the umbrella organisations, the National Commission draws up Rules and Regulations that form an integral part of this Code of Conduct so that the Commission can perform its tasks. These Rules and Regulations also specify the petitions (see Article 7.6) interested parties can submit, how these are handled and what the possible disciplinary measures are if the petition is considered well-founded.
- 7.5 Any party concerned believing that a higher education institution has not acted in accordance with this Code of Conduct can lodge a petition with the National Commission in writing. Prior to lodging a petition with the Commission, the petitioner first submits the complaint to the competent authority of the higher education institution. The higher education institution ensures that existing or, if necessary, new internal complaint procedures are available for complaints under the Code of Conduct.
- 7.6 If the petitioner is of the opinion that the higher education institution has not settled a complaint properly or is still of the opinion that the higher education institution does not comply with the Code of Conduct, he/she may submit the reason for the complaint, and the response thereof received from the higher education institution, to the National Commission.
- 7.7 If after hearing the arguments of both parties, the National Commission establishes that a higher education institution does not comply with this Code of Conduct, the Commission informs the higher education institution and the person submitting the request of its decision and any consequences thereof.
- 7.8 If the National Commission ascertains that an institution has not complied with the provisions of this Code of Conduct, it may impose a measure. This measure may include among other things the obligation to report and/or to investigate and/or a conditional removal, in which case a notification may be included in the Register for the duration of the measure. In situations where no improvement has been demonstrated or in very severe cases, the National Commission may impose a disciplinary measure consisting of the removal from the Register.
- 7.9 If the National Commission decides to remove a higher education institution from the Register, it will also decide on the duration of removal and under which conditions the higher education institution can be included in the register again.
- 7.10 The National Commission notifies the higher education institution, the petitioner, the IND and OCW in writing within one month after its decision has been taken.
- 7.11 The Register Administrator acts as secretary of the National Commission. The secretary informs the Education Inspectorate of all well founded petitions that have been submitted to the National Commission.

## **8 Commencement date and modifications**

- 8.1 The modifications to the Code of Conduct take effect on 1 September 2017.
- 8.2 If a party concerned proposes a modification to the Code of Conduct because of legislative requirements, or when modifications to the Code of Conduct are desirable or necessary for other reasons, the proposed modification is submitted to the umbrella organisations. Modifications can only be effective after the National Commission has given its approval based on recommendations by the umbrella organisations, unless mandatory legislation prohibits this. The Register Administrator ensures publication of the modification and

distribution of the modified Code of Conduct.

- 8.3 Every five years, the content and operation of the Code of Conduct is evaluated by, in any event, the institutions involved, the parties concerned and the Register Administrator. On the basis of this evaluation, the Code of Conduct, whether changed or not, will be adopted and signed by the higher education institutions. The initiative for the evaluation will be taken by the National Commission.

## List of abbreviations

BZ:	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
CAE:	Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English
CPE:	Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English
CROHO:	Central Register of Degree Programmes in Higher Education
EZ:	Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs
FCE:	Cambridge First Certificate in English
Vereniging Hogescholen:	Dutch Association of Universities of Applied Sciences
IELTS:	International English Language Testing System
IND:	Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service
NRTO:	Dutch Council of Training and Education
NUFFIC:	Dutch Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education
OCW:	Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
TOEFL:	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC:	Test of English for International Communications
VenJ:	Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice
VSNU:	Association of Universities in the Netherlands
WHW:	Dutch Higher Education and Research Act