Support services for international students: towards a European code of good practice
Support services for international students in Europe is a subject whose time has come.

To a significant degree, Europe has staked its future on a robust level of student mobility as well as the global competitiveness of its higher education systems. And while students from outside the region clearly seek out academic excellence when considering options for study in Europe, they are also sensitive to what institutions are willing to do to enhance the overall quality of the international student experience.

European higher education institutions and their staff are on the ‘front lines’ of the campaign to raise the level of attractiveness of the educational offer of Europe to international students from around the world. Their responsibilities extend from recruiting and admitting students, to welcoming them on campus and ideally supporting them through to successful completion of their degree programmes.

Why is this work important?

Student services represent a potentially powerful tool for enhancing the quality and sustainability of the overall internationalisation agenda of European higher education, not to mention its global competitive position. At the same time, providing meaningful support services for international students increasingly stands out as ‘the right thing to do’. Moving across national, cultural, and linguistic borders is a complex human experience, as is integrating oneself into a new and potentially very different academic culture.

So, there is a value in providing meaningful services to international students and, increasingly, to articulating a ‘European standard’ in this area. To this end, the ‘European code of good practice’ is put forth here, drawing on the major findings and experiences from the ENATIS project, ‘Enhancing Attractiveness through International Student Services’. Launched in 2008, ENATIS was made possible by funding from the European Commission’s Erasmus Mundus Programme and was coordinated by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), in collaboration with CIRIUS Denmark and International Education Consultants UK.

These suggested guidelines are in no way intended to be an exhaustive or forcibly prescriptive list of requirements. Rather, they suggest the minimum action that should be taken for those actively engaged in the recruitment, support and education of international (particularly full-degree) students in Europe.
Marketing and recruitment
- Ensure that all marketing and promotional material accurately reflects the reality of the institution
- Ensure that all marketing and promotional material is available in the appropriate language(s)
- Provide prospective international students with accurate contact details for staff in the institution who are responsible for marketing and recruitment issues
- Ensure that international students receive regular communication throughout the application and recruitment phase
- Deploy traditional and online communication channels to reach prospective students before they arrive

Pre-arrival
- Support international students to find somewhere to live
- Ensure that information on accommodation options includes the type of housing available, its cost and location, any safety concerns, and any available support network (student or institution-led)
- Offer students complete advice on the process and requirements of applying for and obtaining a student visa
- Offer students complete advice on the process and requirements of institutional registration, including all deadlines
- Offer students complete advice on the process and requirements of any local registration
- Offer students complete advice on the structure and requirements of their academic programme

Arrival
- Provide a complete institution and faculty orientation programme for all new international students
- Consider planning arrival and orientation activities across the whole institution, incorporating academic, social and cultural activities
- Consider holding orientation activities over an extended period of time to ensure late arrivals have appropriate access to the most important information
- Ensure that support is offered to newly arrived students to ensure that they locate appropriate accommodation
- Involve current international and domestic students in arrival and orientation activities
**Academic and social integration**

- Ensure that each international student has a dedicated point of contact within the institution for all academic and social issues
- Provide international students with a dedicated handbook for their continuing support, either online or as a printed publication
- Ensure that a social and cultural programme for international students is offered throughout the year, involving current students, the institution and the local community
- Ensure that international students have access to appropriate academic support and development resources
- Provide clear academic guidelines for each international student, including explicit requirements for success and failure
- Develop and utilise current students to help support new international students through mentoring and “buddy” schemes
- Ensure all international students have access to dedicated language support for academic and social purposes

**Legal regulations**

- Provide clear and concise details of work and other formal regulations to prospective international students
- Designate a point of contact in the institution responsible for advising students on legal requirements
- Ensure all relevant information is updated regularly and is easily accessible to all international students
- Ensure that international students are supported appropriately to find part-time work that satisfies all legal work requirements

**After graduation**

- Offer students the opportunity to remain engaged in the life of the institution
- Offer students membership in a formal alumni association, and allow for active participation in either the host country or their home country
- Offer students the opportunity to connect with prospective international students interested in studying at the host institution
- Provide students with the contact details of former graduates from their home country
- Offer networking opportunities for academic or professional purposes

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