

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA (IEASA)

CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE
IN THE PROVISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS

Preamble

The South African Universities and Technikons have formulated this Code to ensure that the potential benefits of the provision of education to international students who choose to study in South Africa are fully realised for both the students and host institutions.

The offering of fee bearing courses for international students by South African higher education institutions brings with it the ethical business commitment that value for money be provided. Furthermore, it must be recognized that by accepting a place, international students have taken a major step in their lives; they may leave their home countries for long periods, travel considerable distances and undertake considerable expense. The Code has been formulated with these basic considerations in mind.

The broad principles enunciated in the Code apply equally to formal award courses and to non-formal courses offered by all higher education institutions.

The signatories believe that it is essential for all institutions offering courses to international students to make a conscious commitment to the Code and to adopt consistent and caring procedures in the recruitment, reception, education and welfare of international students.

Guidelines, to be read in conjunction with the Code, have been formulated to outline recommended procedures for South African higher education institutions offering courses to international students. The Guidelines provide a check-list to ensure that their practices are consistent with the Code.

The signatories have also formulated guidelines in respect of fees refunds for international students. These guidelines have been adopted with a view to standardising fees refunds across the higher education system and are to apply to all international students irrespective of who pays the fees.

The CHE will be requested to establish a Committee which has, amongst other tasks, responsibility for:

- monitoring and reviewing the Code and Guidelines, and recommending where necessary , amendments to the Code and Guidelines;
- supporting the publicising of the Code both overseas and in South Africa;
- acting as an advisory group to the CHE where cases of questionable ethical practice are brought to the attention of the CHE after all institutional avenues of redress have been exhausted; and providing recommendations to the CHE concerning any remedial action that should be taken.

The Code

The marketing of education services overseas should be consistent with the maintenance of academic standards in South African institutions, and the safeguarding of the interests of both South African and international students. The international student programme is one component of South Africa's educational exchange activities, the general objectives of which are educational and cultural as well as economic.

South African higher education should be promoted accurately and honestly in terms of its quality, its standing and its availability .

Each institution should have a clearly enunciated policy with respect to the promotion and marketing of its education services overseas.

Higher education institutions should acknowledge the need for good practice to ensure fairness in the promotion and marketing of educational services overseas with regard to:

- inter-institutional relations;
- the interests of both local and international students;
- the perceived quality of South African education; and
- the cultural and educational relationships between South Africa and other countries.

Differences between South African higher education institutions should be portrayed in a comprehensive, comprehensible and accurate way so as to project a cooperative marketing image to the target countries. No false or misleading comparisons will be drawn with any other provider.

Selection criteria for international students should be such as to maintain the institution's academic standards and to encourage a high success rate.

South African institutions should recognize their on-going responsibilities for the education and welfare of international students. Institutions should ensure that the academic programmes, support services and learning environment offered to international students will encourage them to have a positive attitude about South African education and South Africa when they return home at the conclusion of their studies.

Institutions should establish an appropriate infrastructure to be the focal point for all enquiries and to ensure both the effective implementation of the institution's international student programme and the provision of all necessary support services.

Institutions should provide to prospective international students accurate and comprehensive information on the institution, admission requirements and procedures, the courses available, tuition and living costs, living conditions, accommodation and other services. Advertisements and promotional literature should not include misleading or ambiguous statements about the nature of the course, or its costs.

Staff members working with international students and representing South African institutions outside the country should be carefully selected and be :

- sympathetic and clear communicators with a thorough knowledge of their own institutions' courses and procedures and of the South African education system generally;
- sensitive to the culture and customs of the target country, and aware of its historical and political background and educational systems; and
- knowledgeable, experienced and competent in the administration of student policy and in face-to-face dealings with students.

To the extent that it is relevant, the spirit of this Code also is intended to apply to institutions and their national and international partner institutions which offer courses through twinning arrangements, exchange agreements, distance education or other modes.

Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions Offering Courses for International Students

The following guidelines, to be read in conjunction with the preceding Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students by South African Higher Education Institutions, outline recommended procedures for South African higher education institutions offering courses to international students. Institutions should use the guidelines as a checklist to ensure that their practices are consistent with the Code of Ethical Practice.

Institutional Infrastructure

Depending on its nature, size, and the extent of its involvement with international students, each institution should identify appropriate contact officers and appropriate units to be responsible for all matters relating to the implementation of the institution's international student programme in particular:

- enquiries relating to international student programmes;
- the efficient administration of admission procedures;
- arrival, accommodation and orientation arrangements for new students;

- the organisation of appropriate English language and academic bridging programmes;
- the ongoing social, cultural and other welfare needs;
- liaison with local groups for international student welfare;
- the monitoring and review of the performance and graduation rates of international students; and
- post-course advice to international students to assist in any necessary re-adjustments prior to their return to their home country , including appropriate' aftercare' .

To enable staff to carry out effectively the tasks for which they are allocated responsibility, institutions should make every effort to :

- ensure that **all** staff involved with international students are competent to deal with the students' special circumstances;
- develop training programmes appropriate to the different levels of involvement and responsibility among staff ; and
- ensure, through the relevant academic department, that for higher degree research students, adequate supervision and facilities will be available for the duration of candidature.

Promotion

Institutions should ensure that South African Diplomatic Missions and other appropriate education agencies overseas are fully cognizant of their involvement in promoting and marketing education, and that such involvement meets all official aspects of participating that will result in good, positive practices in the country concerned.

Institutions should ensure that their promotions and advertisements are honest, do not include misleading or ambiguous statements about the nature of the course and that statements about the comparative merits of other courses and institutions are not unfair, misleading or malicious.

Promotional and Recruitment Visits

Promotional and recruitment visits by institutional representatives should be planned with the maximum possible coordination between institutions. Institutions should ensure that

- adequate notice is given to South African Diplomatic Missions and appropriate educational agencies together with appropriate consultation as necessary;
- accommodation is appropriate for promotional exercises which attract large crowds;
- people undertaking visits abroad are familiar with educational systems and membership requirements of professional bodies; and
- adequate and relevant information materials are prepared for distribution.

Agents

Before entering into contractual arrangements with agents, institutions should make every reasonable effort to ensure their complete satisfaction that the agents are competent, well informed, reputable and will act at all times in the best interests of applicants and the institution.

Agency agreements involving fees paid by institutions and by potential students should be carefully scrutinised.

The relevant South African Diplomatic Mission should be kept informed of any relationships with agents an institution may have. The Mission should be advised in the event of any misrepresentation by agents.

Institutions should ensure that their relationships with agents comply with local laws and regulations.

Information for and Counselling of Students

Institutions should provide to prospective students accurate information covering the following issues :

Academic Matters

- the institution's educational goals and current activities;
- course summaries for the degrees, diplomas and certificates offered, and length of courses;
- registration and/or accreditation status of courses by professional associations and other relevant associated bodies;
- methods of study and assessment;
- admission requirements, prerequisites, application and acceptance procedures;
- credit transfer;
- English language requirements; and
- relevant dates, including academic terms or semesters, registration and dates for withdrawal without financial penalty .

Living Arrangements

- geographic location and climate;
- accommodation options;
- living costs; and
- social customs and mores.

Legal Requirements and Entitlements

- conditions of entry and stay in South Africa;

- employment regulations; and
- mandatory health-care insurance and health-care arrangements.

Fees and Refunds

- cost of courses and other compulsory charges;
- method of payment;
- policy on increases to fees;
- procedures for dealing with exceptional cases related to the payment or refund of fees; and
- procedures for cancellation of enrolment and obtaining refund of fees together with details of financial and academic penalties which may result from cancellation.

Services

- support services available to all students of the institution;
- support services specific to international students; and
- grievance procedures available for international students.

Admission

Institutions should have standards and procedures to ensure students have every chance of success and are capable of benefitting from the course.

Institutions should publish the selection criteria for admission, including specific criteria for particular courses and for international students.

Institutions should be satisfied that candidates selected for admission are suitably qualified academically.

Candidates for admission should be competent in English. Institutions should have clear, well established guidelines on their English language requirements.

Institutions should facilitate swift responses to enquiries and applications and ensure that all necessary documentation is sent at the earliest possible time.

Before admitting international students to postgraduate research degree programmes institutions should clarify the proposed research area with the student and provide a firm written undertaking to provide appropriate supervision and facilities for the duration of the project and make appropriate arrangements for access to ancillary support (laboratory, computing and library facilities). The nature of supervision and facilities should be communicated to the student in the offer of candidature.

Pre-Arrival Information

In the period before international students arrive at the institution, institutions should provide easily understood, up-to-date, accurate and professionally presented information covering such issues as :

- names and telephone numbers of relevant staff to contact in the event of problems on arrival in South Africa;
- cost of living;
- accommodation;
- clothing and food;
- payment of fees;
- travel arrangements from point of arrival in South Africa to the institution;
- information to meet specific needs, e.g. legal, medical, dental, and social security;
- work prospects and casual employment; and
- contact names for further information.

Arrival and Orientation

In order to ensure that new international students are able quickly and effectively to settle in with minimal problems, institutions should :

- where appropriate, arrange for the students to be met on arrival at point of entry into the city or centre in which the institution is located;
- provide suitable orientation programmes which will seek to reinforce material already provided in written form; and
- where necessary, make appropriate arrangements for temporary accommodation for the students.

Student Support –Welfare

Institutions should encourage a supportive environment.

Institutions should develop appropriate support services, including professional counselling services, which will :

- promote the successful adjustment by international students to life and study in South Africa;
- assist students to resolve problems which could impede successful completion of their study programmes; and
- endeavour to ensure that students return home with a positive image of South Africa and its educational opportunities.

Support services should include:

adequate provision of :

- advice (including advice on personal budgeting, accommodation, medical insurance and the availability of health-care services);
- on-arrival orientation and related assistance;
- additional assistance with the English language;
- additional assistance with study skills;
- the organisation of activities which enable international students to experience South African culture and mix with South Africans;
- the promotion of on-campus international student networks and organisations to assist new arrivals; and
- local community involvement to provide social support; and
- the development of resource directories to meet specific needs, e.g. accommodation, medical, dental and legal.

Return Home

It should be assumed that all international students returning home can do so without any difficulty and therefore institutions should :

- be sensitive to the circumstances the student will encounter upon return;
- provide advice and assistance where possible on re-orientation; and
- encourage the 'alumni association' concept and maintain an 'aftercare' programme.
- provide assistance and guidance with transferring credits to home institutions when appropriate.

Guidelines for Fees Refunds: International Students

The signatories have adopted the following guidelines in respect of fees refunds for international students. These guidelines are, as far as possible, to be implemented by higher education institutions and are to apply to all international students irrespective of who pays the fees.

Total Refunds

- In the event that an offer of a place is withdrawn or the institution is unable to provide the course, all tuition fees paid for the semester are fully refundable, unless the offer was made on the basis of incorrect or incomplete information being supplied by the applicant/student in which case the institution reserves the right to retain up to 10% of the fee for one semester.
- A student who fails to meet degree/diploma progression rules and who is thus not permitted to re-enrol will be eligible for a refund of fees paid for the next phase of the course, if payment has been received in advance of notification of exclusion.

- A notice of withdrawal due to exceptional circumstances (see 3.1 below) may be accepted as grounds for a total refund of tuition fees paid less deductions for foreign exchange transactions.

Partial Refunds

(Note: The guidelines for partial refunds apply equally to commencing students and continuing students).

- Where a student after accepting an offer of a place, gives a minimum of four weeks written notice before the commencement of the semester of an inability to undertake the course, all tuition fees paid are refundable less an administrative fee of up to 10%.
- Where a student gives less than four weeks written notice before the commencement of the semester of an inability to undertake the course, all tuition fees paid are refundable less 50% (including an administrative fee of up to 10%).
- Where a student withdraws from a course within the first two teaching weeks of a semester, all tuition fees are refundable less 50% (including an administrative fee of up to 10%).

Grounds for Refunds

A notice of withdrawal due to exceptional circumstances, including

- inability to obtain a study permit;
- illness or disability;
- death of the student or a close family member (parent, sibling, spouse or child); or
- a political, civil or natural event which prevents full payment of fees may be accepted as grounds for either a total or partial refund of fees, subject to the provision of acceptable documentary evidence in support of the application for a refund.

Fees Refunds related to International Students who obtain Permanent Resident Status in South Africa

- If the student has already paid the tuition fees applying to international students for the semester, a partial refund of these fees as determined by the institution will be payable to the student if the student has obtained Permanent Resident status by the start of that semester; and
- If the student obtains Permanent Resident status after the start of a semester, the student will be classified as an international student for the remainder of that semester. The student will be liable to pay the tuition fees applying to international students for that semester. From the following semester, the student will be classified as a Permanent Resident and will be liable to pay the subsidized fee.

Agreements between Institutions and International Students regarding Fees Refunds

Institutions should ensure that there is a signed agreement between the institution and each international student to accept the institution's stated fees refunds policy.

Payment of Refunds

Where there is a written agreement between the institution and the international student regarding the institution's fees refund policy, the terms of that agreement will apply to the payment of refunds.

Where there is no such written agreement between the institution and the international student, payment of refunds should be made as follows :

- where the institution defaults, within two weeks after the date of withdrawal of the offer of a place or notification that the institution is unable to provide the course; and
- where the student defaults, within six weeks after receiving a written claim from the institution in accordance with these guidelines.

Refunds should be reimbursed in the same currency as the fees were originally paid less exchange costs and will be made in the student's home country except in exceptional circumstances.

Appeals Process related to Fees Refunds

Institutions should ensure that there is a clearly defined appeals process related to the refund of fees, whereby the institution's decisions regarding fees refunds can be appealed if the student believes that the institution has not honoured its stated fees refund policy or not all of the relevant information has been taken into account.

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