

DECISION

On the petition of 24 May 2022
of a prospective student requesting registration for the Master's degree programme in Mechanical Engineering of the University of Twente, hereafter the Petitioner,
regarding the alleged conduct of the University of Twente.

1. COURSE OF THE PROCEDURE

On 24 July, the National Commission received a petition from the Petitioner relating to the provision of information by the University of Twente about the admission requirements for its Master's degree programme in Mechanical Engineering. The Petitioner related their petition to Article 2.1c of the Code of Conduct Higher Education.

The National Commission confirmed the receipt of the petition on 27 July 2022. It informed the Petitioner that the National Commission would not convene for a meeting in July and August so that it would discuss the petition in September 2022 at the earliest.

The National Commission discussed the petition on 14 September 2022 and decided on substantive handling. On 15 September 2022, the Board of the University of Twente was informed of the petition and allowed to explain its views in writing and to answer several questions. On 29 September 2022, the National Commission received an email from the University of Twente containing its response.

In its meeting on 19 October 2022, the National Commission discussed the petition and the response of the Board of the University of Twente and pronounced its decision.

2. CONTENT OF THE PETITION

The petition addressed the dependability of the University of Twente's provision of information about the admission requirements of its Master's degree programme in Mechanical Engineering. The Petitioner stated that based on the information provided by the University of Twente, their qualifications, which is a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering obtained from the Hochschule Osnabrück, they most likely would have been admissible to the Master's degree programme in Mechanical Engineering. However, the request for admission to the study programme was rejected. The Petitioner feels misled and is of the opinion that the University of Twente's provision of information does not satisfy the conditions of the Code of Conduct.

The Petitioner expects their complaint to contribute to improving the University of Twente's provision of information to prevent other (international) students from coming into a comparable situation.

3. ADMISSIBILITY

The National Commission is competent to inspect the conduct concerning the relationship between the educational institutions listed in the register of the Code of Conduct and international students attending, attending in future, or having attended courses in the Netherlands. The conduct must date from after the date of inclusion in the register.

The University of Twente is an institution of higher education and has been included in the register of the Code of Conduct since 28 April 2006. The conduct dated from after that date.

The Petitioner has German nationality, as proved by a copy of their ID card. The Petitioner requested admission to the University of Twente and can be considered a prospective international student.

The Petitioner followed the educational institution's internal complaints procedures before submitting this petition. The Petitioner included copies of the process followed in the petition.

The National Commission established the petition's admissibility and proceeded to substantial handling.

4. ASSESSMENT

Article 2.1c - Information provision

By signing the Code of Conduct Higher Education, the University of Twente has committed itself to providing international students with timely, reliable, and easily accessible information on its website and other channels. To promote it, Article 2.1c requires the University of Twente to provide adequate information about the required qualifications for the programmes it offers.

The Petitioner's view

The Petitioner stated that the University of Twente did not act in line with Article 2.1c of the Code of Conduct. The information about the admission requirements for the Master's degree programme in Mechanical Engineering provided by the educational institution contradicts the result of the Petitioner's request for admission.

According to the Petitioner, the available information suggested that a Bachelor's degree in Science in Mechanical Engineering obtained from a German *Fachhochschule* would qualify for admission to the Master's degree programme in Mechanical Engineering. However, the University of Twente rejected the request for admission because the Petitioner's qualifications were not equivalent to a Dutch academic Bachelor's degree.

The Petitioner gave the following arguments to substantiate their position:

- The University of Twente's webpage contains a list of general qualification requirements specifying the qualifications for each country. The following applies to Germany: 'To be considered for admission to a MSc programme, applicants should have a *Fachhochschuldiplom*, *Diplom* or Bachelor degree.' The Petitioner stated that no distinction was made between a Bachelor's degree obtained from a university of applied sciences or an academic University and that a *Fachhochschuldiplom* qualifies for admission to a Master's degree programme.
- The outcome of the eligibility check (an online tool indicating admissibility based on the candidate's qualifications, among other things) was positive. The Petitioner remarked to be aware that no rights may be derived from this check. The Petitioner wondered how it can be that the eligibility check indicated that they were admissible since no one with a degree from the *Fachhochschule* would be considered admissible to a Master's degree programme.
- Information obtained during participation in an online open house. In this meeting, the Petitioner asked whether a Bachelor's degree obtained from a university of applied sciences in another country could give rise to problems concerning admissibility to a Master's degree programme. The Petitioner remarked that they were assured that a Bachelor of Science would suffice and that restrictive rules regarding degrees from a Dutch university of applied sciences would not be applied to comparable colleges in other countries.

Based on the above, the Petitioner concluded that the University of Twente's provision of information is not in agreement with the results of their request for admission to the Master's programme in Mechanical Engineering.

Response of the University of Twente

In response to the petition, the University of Twente indicated that its website references the University of Twente's general admission requirements and that degree programmes decide on the specific admission requirements. According to the University of Twente, an eligibility check is only of additional value to show what is needed to be admitted. The University of Twente further remarked that giving (more) specific information on its website is difficult, which is why it stated that information is only indicative. The University of Twente thought that it communicated clearly to that effect. Furthermore, the University of Twente acknowledged that the information on the list of countries could be more precise. The University of Twente explained that the list of countries applies to its entire range of programmes offered.

A distinction can be made between qualifications that offer admission to a pre-master and qualifications that offer admission to a Master's programme. A *Fachhochschuldiplom* only offers admission to a pre-master and not directly to a Master's programme. The University of Twente remarked that the list of countries could indicate

that a Fachhochschuldiplom only qualifies for admission to a pre-master. The findings about the list of countries shall be discussed internally within the University of Twente.

Assessment National Commission

The question for the National Commission to answer is whether the University of Twente acted in accordance with the Code of Conduct and whether it informed the prospective student sufficiently clearly about the admission requirements for the degree programme in Mechanical Engineering. The provision of information during the online open house is not imitable, and therefore the National Commission will not include it in this investigation. The National Commission emphasises that neither the valuation of certificates nor the adoption of admission requirements can be part of its assessment.

The list of countries

Firstly, the National Commission observes that the University of Twente acknowledged that the information provided on the list of countries is not sufficiently clear and could be more precise. It is unclear to a prospective student that the list of countries specifies qualifications offering admission to both a pre-master and a Master's programme. Otherwise, the webpage containing general information about the admission requirements is sufficiently clear. The University of Twente commented that this page only contains the general admission requirements for the Master's programme. In addition to this, specific requirements that apply can be found on the page of the degree programme. Furthermore, it is explained extensively that a binary system applies in the Netherlands and that for a Master's degree programme at the University of Twente, the minimum requirement is an academic Bachelor's degree.

The webpage of the degree programme in Mechanical Engineering contains information about the specific admission requirements. No specific mention is made that an academic Bachelor's degree is one of the requirements. However, this is stated on the website containing general information. At the bottom of the page, the list of countries also has been included, suggesting that this list of countries is attuned to the specific degree programme. Nonetheless, the outcome for Germany is identical to the list of countries and is included on the webpage. The National Commission understands that this may be confusing to a prospective student.

The eligibility check

The explanatory notes to the eligibility check suggest that it concerns personal advice matching the prospective student's individual situation. The candidate must provide information about their nationality, qualifications, and choice for the degree programme to be followed. The National Commission remarks that the texts provided during the check and at the outcome of the eligibility check state that the results are indicative and that no rights can be derived from the results. The National Commission understands that the applicant's individual situation must be included when assessing admissibility. Nevertheless, the National Commission thinks that in the case of the Petitioner, the result of the eligibility check painted a picture that was too rosy since the University of Twente's viewpoint expressed on 29 September 2022 proves that a Bachelor's degree obtained from a German Fachhochschule does not qualify for admission to the Master's degree programme in Mechanical Engineering.

The National Commission is of the opinion that the University of Twente – as it partly acknowledged in its response – provided insufficiently clear information about the admission requirements for the Master's programme in Mechanical Engineering on its website.

5. DECISION

The National Commission concludes, based on all that has been considered above, that the University of Twente has acted contrary to Article 2.1c of the Code of Conduct. The information the University of Twente provided on its website about the admission requirements is unclear and may confuse a prospective student. To that extent, the National Commission declares the petition well-founded.

The National Commission emphasises the importance of complete and reliable information. Based on the list of countries, combined with the result of the eligibility check, the Petitioner assumed that they could be admitted. The Petitioner did not expect their request for admission to be rejected based on their qualifications, which led to disappointment.

6. MEASURE

The National Commission orders the University of Twente to clarify the provision of information on its website, specifically the list of countries, which should distinguish between qualifications that provide admission to a Master's programme or only the pre-master. In addition, the eligibility check must be modified so that a Bachelor's degree obtained from a German Fachhochschule cannot lead to a positive result regarding admission to a Master's programme in Mechanical Engineering in agreement with the admission requirement that an academic Bachelor's degree must be obtained.

The National Commission requests the University of Twente to inform the National Commission about implementing the imposed order within one month of sending the decision.

7. IN ADDITION

As part of the complaint procedure with the National Commission, the Petitioner submitted copies of the decision on their admission application, as well as of the objection and appeal procedure at the University of Twente. The National Commission noticed that in the decision on the application for admission dated 4 April 2022, the standard option has been selected, which indicates that: *'The level of your prior education does not meet the requirements for the programme. The admission committee has come to the conclusion that **the level of your prior education** is not equivalent to the bachelor's degree from a Dutch Research University, which is the minimum requirement for entering this specific (pre-)Master's programme. For more information see the back of this letter.'*

Although it is explained on the back of the decision of the application for admission, as well as on the website of the University of Twente, that the distinction between a bachelor's degree obtained at a university of applied sciences or research university involves a difference in orientation, the above quoted text gives the impression that it is a difference in level. The same applies to the decision on the appeal of 26 April 2022, in which it was noted that a bachelor's degree obtained at a university of applied sciences is of an insufficiently high level to be admitted to a master's degree program at the University of Twente. The National Commission is of the opinion that the University of Twente is insufficiently precise about this. As stated on the [Nuffic website](#), to which the University of Twente also refers, there is a difference in the orientation of education. The level of a bachelor's degree obtained at a university of applied sciences, as well as a bachelor's degree obtained at a research university, is classified by Nuffic at level six of the Dutch Qualification Framework (NLQF). The National Commission therefore calls on the University of Twente to exercise due care in its communication about this.

Delivered in Utrecht on 19 October 2022,

P.M.M. Rullmann, chairperson; M.S. Menéndez, K. Penninga, F.A.M. Snijders, and L.J.M. Verhofstad, members; G. van Leerzem, substitute member; in the presence of E.J. Wijers, investigator and J.G. van den Bosch, secretary.

P.M.M. Rullmann
Chairman

J.G. van den Bosch
Secretary

Sent on 7 November 2022