

Agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia and Higher Education Institutions on Good Practice of Attracting International Students and Delivering Studies

In order to build up the international reputation of Latvia and its higher education institutions and to provide international students with positive experiences in Latvia, as well as to attract for studies in Latvia only such potential students as are motivated to obtain a diploma of higher education in systematic studies, and

recognising that the internationalisation of higher education is today important in the work of every higher education institution, ensuring the need to develop study programmes and processes in accordance with the quality criteria accepted in international practice,

enabling lecturers to expand their international cooperation by participating in international study and research projects or programmes, and universities to attract foreign lecturers,

bearing in mind that the presence of international students would enable any student of a higher education institution in Latvia to master intercultural competences and enrich intercultural experiences in the study process and in public life;

acknowledging that studies abroad are an important decision in the life of each young person, the implementation of which is also the responsibility of the higher education institution,

undertaking to implement and constantly work on ensuring quality studies and a modern study environment for each student,

emphasising the need to familiarise international students with Latvian culture and inform them comprehensively and responsibly about Latvian society, principles of non-discrimination and the values enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and the documents of the European Union,

the higher education institutions which have signed this agreement undertake to observe and implement the provisions of this agreement in good faith:

1. General Provisions

1.1. The purpose of this agreement is to define basic principles that the higher education institutions, which have signed this agreement, undertake to adhere to in good faith in the process of attracting international students and during their entire study process.

1.2. The principles of this agreement and the commitment refer to all international and internationalisation activities implemented by the higher education institution in Latvia or internationally regardless of whether the activity is related to the spending of state budget funds or has other sources of funding.

1.3. With this agreement, within the scope of its competence, the higher education institution undertakes to promote a positive image of the state and to promote in its operations the international recognition, quality and competitiveness of higher education in Latvia.

1.4. The higher education institution adheres to the principles of integrity and ethics in all marketing and advertising to attract international students, providing only truthful

information.

1.5. The higher education institution is committed to ensuring that the foreign student has a positive experience of both studies and the study process at the higher education institution and of Latvia and the higher education system in Latvia.

1.6. The higher education institution undertakes to provide data on its activities on the European Union's university assessment platform "U-Multirank" and provides a link to it.

1.7. The higher education institution has an internationalisation strategy or work plan to attract international students at least in the medium term.

2. Information about Study Opportunities

2.1. The higher education institution maintains and regularly updates the section of the website for international students and ensures that prospective international students receive timely and complete information on:

2.1.1. the accreditation of the higher education institution and study programme (including the date of accreditation), which is the basis for issuing a state-recognised diploma, and other measures related to quality assurance in the study process;

2.1.2. the degree to be obtained according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and *International Standard Classification of Education* (ISCED) level;

2.1.3. the duration of the study programme, the total number of credits in the Latvian credit and European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the main plan of the study courses, including course descriptions and learning outcomes for each study course, the language of study, as well as other academic conditions in the study programme/process, if applicable (e.g. compulsory internship, short-term mobility opportunities, etc.);

2.1.4. enrolment conditions and requirements (including application deadlines, documents to be submitted), and general administrative procedures;

2.1.5. the procedure for recognising prior learning; tuition fees and the costs of administrative procedures, such as registration fees; and the conditions and procedures for reimbursing tuition fees.

2.2. The higher education institution shall ensure that the information provided in English or in the respective language of implementation of the study programme and in Latvian about the same study programme and its implementation is identical. The course catalogue is also available in English.

2.3. The higher education institution shall provide timely information support to potential foreign students not only on the issues mentioned in Sub-paragraph 2.1, but also on issues related to living or living in Latvia and in the city where the host university is located.

3. Selection of International Students

3.1. The higher education institution shall set the following conditions for potential international students in first level professional higher education programmes and Bachelor level education programmes:

3.1.1. the higher education institution examines the education certificates obtained in the previous education and the documents of persons who, in their country of origin, have obtained the lowest grade in one of the profile subjects of the relevant study programme or whose average grade at the previous level of education is less than 60% of the maximum grade, are not further recognised.

3.1.2. if the potential foreign student's previous education was in another language, an internationally recognised certificate or other assessment is required, in accordance with existing government regulations, certifying proficiency at B2 level in the foreign language in which the programme of study is being pursued;

3.2. The requirements for the selection of foreign students for higher-level study programmes (Master's, Doctoral) are determined by the higher education institution itself, taking into account a recognised diploma of previous education, but subject to the requirements set out in Sub-paragraph 3.1.

3.3. It is compulsory for a higher education institution to organise a digital interview with a third-country applicant who requires a visa to enter Latvia in order to determine his/her motivation to study at the higher education institution and the sincerity of his/her intentions. At the beginning of the interview, the identity of the applicant is verified. The interview is recorded, registered and stored in accordance with the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data¹ and the Personal Data Processing Law², and presented to the relevant public authorities upon request. The higher education institution will keep a record of the interview for one year. It is recommended to higher education institution to carry out an interview with a applicant who is a citizen of a country that does not require a visa to enter Latvia.

3.4. The higher education institution informs the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the results of the selection of students whose entry requires visas by submitting the list of selected students no later than two weeks before the start of full-time studies to the e-mail address: sengenas.vizas@mfa.gov.lv and to the e-mail address of the Latvian diplomatic and consular mission (hereinafter - the mission) where the students on the list are to submit documents for a long-term visa. The list should separately highlight information on those students who are subject to the additional checks provided for in Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 554 of 21 June 2010 "Regulation Regarding States for the Citizens of which in Issuing a Visa or a Residence Permit an Additional Assessment shall be Performed"³ (hereinafter - Cabinet Regulation No 554).

¹ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2016:119:FULL&from=LV>

² Personal Data Processing Law, 5 July 2018. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/300099-personal-data-processing-law>

³ Regulation Regarding States for the Citizens of which in Issuing a Visa or a Residence Permit an Additional Assessment shall be Performed, Cabinet of Ministers No 554, 21 June 2010. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/212364-regulation-regarding-states-for-the-citizens-of-which-in-issuing-a-visa-or-a-residence-permit-an-additional-assessment-shall-be-performed>

4. Conditions for Marketing Activities in Attracting International Students and Work with Commercial Agents

4.1. In any marketing and advertising activity, the higher education institution shall ensure that all information provided to potential international students is true and does not create a misleading impression.

4.2. If the higher education institution or its authorised organisation uses agents (organisations or natural persons), the higher education institution shall develop criteria for the selection of agents (including the agents' awareness of the Latvian education system, the respective higher education institution and its study programmes), conclude a written agreement with them, which shall stipulate the fair practice in attracting foreign students, mutual payment procedures, information exchange issues, duties and responsibilities of the higher education institution and the agents.

4.3. The higher education institution or an organisation authorised by the higher education institution shall encourage agents (organisations or individuals) to comply with the principles contained in this Agreement as far as the activities of agents (organisations or individuals) in the recruitment of students are concerned.

4.4. The higher education institution shall publish on its website or in the admissions information system information on the agents (organisations or natural persons) that are entitled to recruit students in their countries of accreditation and shall update the information immediately if cooperation with an agent is discontinued. The higher education institution informs the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the address of the website where this information is published. The higher education institution decides on the selection of applicants recruited by agents (organisations or individuals).

4.5. After the first semester, the higher education institution surveys the new students about the procedures carried out by the agents (organisations or individuals) and evaluates them. The higher education institution promotes good practices of agents (organisations or individuals) in attracting potential students, being aware of the need to address the risks of illegal immigration in the common area of the European Union and the Schengen Agreement countries.

5. Ensuring Study and Environmental Support

5.1. The higher education institution sends a confirmation letter to the enrolled (matriculated) student about the enrollment to the respective study programme and university.

5.2. Before their arrival in Latvia, the higher education institution sends the student the following basic information: academic calendar and organisation of studies; documents required, visa and residence permit procedures; how to get to the university; information on finding accommodation, contact details.

5.3. The higher education institution organises the work of its international department so that students can get answers to their questions not only about their studies, but also about life and living in Latvia before they arrive in Latvia. Also in the first weeks, international students are given the support they need to settle in Latvia, including information about the student council and the possibility to participate in it, as well as the interest clubs at the higher education institution.

5.4. At the beginning of the course, the higher education institution organises an information day(s) in person or remotely for the student individually or for a group of students, providing general information about Latvia and the relevant city, the university, the study process and student life. This information day(s) provide students with a wide range of useful and practical information on how the higher education institution deals with student complaints, access to healthcare, safety issues, emergency services, leisure activities and public transport.

5.5. The higher education institution provides the opportunity for foreign students to study Latvian as an optional language at least at A2 level also in cases when it is not stipulated by the Law on Higher Education Institutions, and provides support in B1 level study for students who wish to do so.

5.6. The higher education institution provides courses that create an understanding of Latvian culture and identity and promote the integration of foreign students into the Latvian cultural sphere and the city where the higher education institution is located.

5.7. The higher education institution concludes a study agreement with each foreign student, which sets out the student's rights and obligations, the tuition fee and the procedure for its payment, as well as the rights and obligations of the higher education institution.

5.8. The study agreement stipulates that part of the study programme may be delivered remotely in situations defined by external laws and regulations. The agreement also sets out the procedure for tuition fee reimbursement if the student is forced to interrupt his/her studies due to external circumstances, and stipulates that in case of visa refusal, the student must submit an application for tuition fee reimbursement to the higher education institution within six months, indicating the account number and beneficiary. The reimbursement is made within one month from the date of receipt of the application.

5.9. The higher education institution shall ensure that study programmes for foreign students are implemented by qualified lecturers with a high level of proficiency in the foreign language of the programme, preferably at C1 level, providing foreign language courses where necessary.

5.10. The higher education institution carries out continuous internal quality control to ensure the quality of study programmes, including those involving international students.

5.11. The higher education institution ensures and promotes an adequate level of foreign language skills among the staff of the international department, as well as other higher education institution staff, including technical staff, who work with foreign students.

5.12. The higher education institution organises training courses for teaching, administrative and technical staff on intercultural communication and cultural differences to raise their awareness of what to consider when working with students from different countries and cultures.

5.13. The higher education institution offers support services for international students that are identical to those available to Latvian students, such as career support or psychological counselling.

5.14. A sample of international students is interviewed at least once every academic year to obtain information on their satisfaction with the quality and process of their studies, as well as problems they have encountered in their studies or in their everyday life. The information is analysed and used by the higher education institution to improve the study process and the study environment.

6. Collaboration with the Ministry and State Governance Institutions

6.1. The higher education institutions that have signed the Agreement are included in communication channels for foreign students, as well as in other marketing activities, materials and information events in Latvia and abroad, maintained with state budget funds.

6.2. The participating ministries and State governance institutions invite the higher education institutions that have signed this agreement, taking into account their interests and in accordance with the programme of the foreign visit, to participate in their official delegations, invite their representatives to participate in the visits of foreign representatives to Latvia, if applicable, and may consult with them in the preparation of foreign visits.

6.3. The Ministry of Education and Science, Study in Latvia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs publish this Agreement on their websites in Latvian and English, as well as place this information in other public media that promote study opportunities, recommending these Latvian higher education institutions as implementers of good practice.

6.4. Higher education institutions that have signed this Agreement may be included in other national showcase events or events supporting higher education exports.

6.5. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall ensure that visa applications for students of the higher education institutions that have signed this Agreement are processed on a priority basis within 15 calendar days of their receipt at the mission and within 30 calendar days for those students who are subject to the additional checks provided for in Cabinet Regulation No 554. If the student fails to appear for the in-person or remote interview arranged by the mission at the office of the external service provider, or in other cases where the student has provided incomplete documents or information in the visa application, or additional checks are required, the mission may extend the processing of visa applications by up to 60 calendar days.

6.6. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will work to expand the network of outsourced visa centres in the regions that are important for the higher education institutions that have signed the agreement.

6.7. The missions shall immediately provide the higher education institutions with any information in their possession concerning possible fraudulent behaviour or practices by agents (organisations or individuals) in the recruitment of potential students.

6.8. The Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informs higher education institutions and Study in Latvia about visa refusal statistics twice a year (in February and September).

6.9. Foreign applicants have the right to transfer their means of subsistence to higher education institution accounts, which certify the existence of their means of subsistence in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 225 of 25 April 2017 "Regulations Regarding the Amount of Financial Means Necessary for a Foreigner and the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means"⁴. In this case, the applicant does not need any other form of proof of financial means when submitting the visa application documents, except in cases of reasonable doubt, when the consular officer of the mission may ask to present them. If the applicant is refused a visa, the higher education institution will reimburse the

⁴ Regulations Regarding the Amount of Financial Means Necessary for a Foreigner and the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means, Cabinet of Ministers No 225, 25 April 2017. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/290808-regulations-regarding-the-amount-of-financial-means-necessary-for-a-foreigner-and-the-determination-of-the-existence-of-financial-means>

subsistence funds credited to the applicant's account within 30 days.

6.10. If a student whose country of citizenship is outside the European Union and the European Economic Area has not attended the study programme of the higher education institution for 14 consecutive days without a justifiable reason and cannot be reached, the higher education institution shall immediately inform the State Border Guard and the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

6.11. The fee set by the higher education institution for the examination of applications for studies is capped at EUR 250.

6.12. The State Education Development Agency and the Ministry of Education and Science, when drafting changes in the normative acts regulating the admission process of foreign applicants or drafting new such normative acts, undertake to provide advantages to the higher education institutions that have signed this Agreement.

7. Cooperation with Study in Latvia

7.1. By signing this agreement, the higher education institutions acquire the right to use the identity element "Best practice universities" included in the "Study in Latvia" brand guidelines, which confirms their affiliation to the national initiative "Study in Latvia". Higher education institutions can use it in their communication materials and digital environment, following the brand guidelines, demonstrating their ownership of the nationwide initiative, as well as expanding the use of the brand in general.

7.2. The higher education institutions that have signed the Agreement and the study programmes they offer are listed on the website www.studyinlatvia.lv and promoted in the social networks of Study in Latvia, as well as in other information materials and events, which are created and organised within the framework of Study in Latvia, if the study programmes meet the following criteria: the study programme is implemented in one of the foreign languages - official languages of the European Union, and the respective language is indicated in the accreditation register of study fields (Higher Education Quality Agency - AIKA platform / State Education Information System - VIIS); the study field in which the study programme is implemented is accredited for a maximum period of six years.

7.3. By signing this Agreement, the higher education institutions regularly cooperate with the State Education Development Agency, the implementer of the Study in Latvia national initiative, by providing timely information about the study programmes offered to foreign students, exportability measures and marketing activities, as well as about their changes, so that the Study in Latvia website, social networks, materials and events reflect up-to-date and relevant information for foreign students.

8. Implementation of the Agreement and the Parties to the Agreement

8.1. Any Latvian higher education institution which is registered and accredited in the Republic of Latvia can join and sign this agreement for its entire effective period, undertaking to implement the principles and activities described in this agreement.

8.2. The Agreement is concluded for a period of three years, and after three years its implementation shall be evaluated by a committee (hereinafter - the Committee) established

by the Director of the State Education Development Agency, which shall collectively decide on the termination or extension of the Agreement, reviewing the necessary changes to the Agreement.

8.3. Any party to this Agreement may terminate its participation in this Agreement by giving written notice of its intention to do so to the other parties.

8.4. In the event of repeated and unresolved breaches of the terms of the Agreement, the Committee reserves the right to suspend the Agreement with the higher education institution until the end of the Agreement period. Before signing a new Agreement, it is assessed whether the identified non-compliances and/or deficiencies have been remedied according to the criteria for admission (see Annex 1).

Signatories:

*Ministry of Education and
Science*

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of the Interior

*SIA "Baltijas Starptautiskā
akadēmija" (Baltic
International Academy)*

Graduate School of Banking

*SIA "Biznesa augstskola
Turība" (Turība University)*

*SIA "Biznesa, mākslas un
tehnoloģiju augstskola
RISEBA" (University of
Applied Sciences RISEBA)*

Daugavpils University

European Christian Academy

Latvian Academy of Culture

*Latvian University of
Biosciences and Technology*

Art Academy of Latvia

*Latvian Academy of Sports
Education*

University of Latvia

Liepāja University

Rīga Stradiņš University

Riga Technical University

*SIA “Stockholm School of
Economics in Riga”*

Date of signature: 2022

Criteria for eligibility for the Agreement on good practice in attracting foreign students and delivering studies

Annex No. 1

I. Organisation and Process Management

1. **The higher education institution has a department or international office that provides:**
 - 1.1. information on the enrollment process and study programmes;
 - 1.2. support with administrative procedures;
 - 1.3. information for new international students before their arrival and at the start of their studies (including information days after arrival; availability of information on the website of the higher education institution and involvement of volunteers, assistants or existing international students in providing support);
 - 1.4. support services and information about living in Latvia/the relevant city.

2. **The higher education institution provides feedback to international students, including:**
 - 2.1. the higher education institution surveys international students once a year about their satisfaction with their studies and living conditions. Mention what improvements have been made based on the results of the surveys, if applicable;
 - 2.2. the higher education institution has a way/model to deal with complaints from international students;
 - 2.3. the interests of international students are represented in the student self-government bodies of the higher education institution;
 - 2.4. the higher education institution organises and supports integration activities for international students.

3. **The higher education institution has an internationalisation strategy or work plan to attract international students at least in the medium term.**

II. Attracting and Enrolling International Students

4. If the higher education institution or its authorized organisation uses agents (organisations or individuals) in the target countries to attract students, the higher education institution has developed selection criteria for the agents (organisations or individuals) and monitors their performance.
5. The higher education institution provides a link on its website to its ranking on the U-Multirank platform.
6. The higher education institution organises an online interview with each international applicant who requires a visa to enter Latvia and keeps a record of the interview for one year in accordance with the procedures established by the higher education institution.

Other international applicants are interviewed by the higher education institution on a voluntary basis.

III. Study Process

7. The internal quality control system of the higher education institution includes quality assurance aspects related to the provision of quality study process, including study programmes for foreigners.
8. Proportion of higher education institution lecturers working in study programmes with B2 and C1 levels of English (separately).
9. The higher education institution provides English language training for local lecturers.
10. The higher education institution educates academic, administrative and technical staff about cultural differences and intercultural communication.

IV. Statistical and Other Relevant Indicators

11. Graduation rates of international students:
 - 11.1. graduates vs. matriculated international students
 - 11.2. the share of international graduates in the total number of graduates.*(VIIS data, information submitted to the MoE)*
12. Academic year drop-out rate of international students *(VIIS data, information provided by the Ministry of Education and Science)*.
13. The number of visa refusals per calendar year is limited to 20% (if the number of visa applications is greater than or equal to 50) or 30% if the number of visa applications is less than 50. *(Information submitted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)*. This indicator does not apply if the number of applications to the higher education institution is 10 or less per year.
14. Proportion of the number of persons submitting educational documents to the AIC and the number of matriculated persons in the higher education institution, taking into account the attached list of countries *(VIIS data, information provided by the MoES)*. *The indicator will apply from 2022 onwards, it is included here for information and will not yet be included in this assessment.*
15. Satisfaction of incoming foreign exchange students with their mobility experience at the higher education institution *(Erasmus+ data, information provided by SEDA)*.
16. At least 5% of the academic staff in the previous academic year are foreign lecturers and/or guest lecturers *(CSP data, information provided by the Ministry of Education and Science)*.
 - 16.1. additional: visiting lecturers (number) within Erasmus+ mobility programmes *(Erasmus+ data, submitted to SEDA)*.
17. The higher education institution has no tax debts at the time of the Committee's decision.
18. The higher education institution, its managers, owners, beneficial owners are not included in national and international sanctions lists at the time of the decision of the Committee.

V. Other Information

19. Information from other relevant government institutions on international student recruitment practices and study processes of the higher education institution.