

Dutch Immigration PROCEDURES

Still a Challenge for Both Students and Dutch Educational Institutes?

For years now, Dutch educational institutes have been submitting applications for Dutch entry visas on behalf of their international students. Since the summer of 2007, they can now also submit an application for a residence permit on behalf of their international students - rather than having the students do this via the local City Hall. As of the summer 2008, this will become compulsory.

The extra layer of the City Hall has been removed because it was considered to be inefficient - instead, the Dutch educational institutes have been introduced as a step in the process. How have Dutch educational institutes dealt with this extra task and how will they deal with it in the future?

Burden

Over the last couple of years, Dutch educational institutes could only assist their new incoming international students up to a certain point. The students themselves were responsible for submitting their application for a residence permit. Having made the decision to study in the Netherlands, they were considered mature enough to take full responsibility for the complete residence and immigration procedure. However, the process was not easy to navigate, particularly if you take into account the fact that all written communication from the Dutch Immigration Service was in Dutch! Also for the City Halls that had to deal with the international students, the administrative burden was quite heavy, as the specialist knowledge there was not as

high as the Immigration Service would have liked.

Taking Over the Task

As the Dutch educational institutes already have a good working relationship with the Immigration Services - built up during the entry visa application process - and the correct specialist knowledge required to deal with these types of applications, they have



been requested to take over this task. An added benefit is that the educational institutes also have easier access to their students and can keep them better informed regarding immigration issues than an external party. The institutes are expected to ensure that the students hand in the required documents within a certain timeframe, that these docu-

ments are submitted together with the residence permit application form, that the students who sign the application form are aware of what they are signing for - and that the applications are submitted to the IND. After that, they are expected to keep track the status of their students' applications, inform the students throughout the various stages of the process, respond to additional requests from the IND and make sure everything is completed within a certain timeframe.

Tilburg University

Tilburg University is one of the institutions that has to deal with this new situation. Even before the IND's policy change for both the entry visa and the residence permit, the university had two separate offices to deal with this situation. The faculty with the largest number of students worked with the IND to apply for entry visas, whilst a central office provided this service for students from the other faculties.

In May 2006, a new central International Office was created at Tilburg University. One of the duties of the new Office was to centralise the handling of immigration requirements for all students. The Office was immediately confronted with both the new policy of the IND and with the success of the University's international marketing efforts, resulting in an increase in the number of international students with visa and residence permit requirements.

Evaluating the System

The new International Office created a procedure for all administrative processes relating to immigration requirements, in cooperation with the faculties. During the first cycle of applications in the summer and autumn of 2007, many challenges (both expected and unexpected) were faced by the International Office, the majority of which were met by the flexibility and dedication of the team. Having completed an

internal evaluation of the procedures, the University decided to ask an external party to review the procedures. To ensure a timely and efficient processing of both visa and residence permit applications, the Director of the International Office at Tilburg University asked an independent immigration consultancy company to analyse their work processes. Were the processes used at the International Office sufficient to deal with the new tasks and the challenges created by IND policy changes, both current and future?

Two of the International Office's team members, worked intensively with XCent Expat Support for several weeks to answer these questions and together propose and discuss options to improve the existing systems.

Improved Service

The analysis, and the improvements proposed as a consequence of this analysis, have resulted in an International Office which can now offer an improved standard of service to both students, the IND and other involved external and internal parties, such as the faculties, the GGD (Municipal Health Services) and the City Hall.

The International Office will now be working with a more comprehensive procedure and realistic deadlines. It can meet the differing requirements of students, faculties and other parties. With the help of XCent Expat Support, they have been able to identify weak areas in the current procedure and, at the same, create a new procedure that will hopefully ensure the efficient and

timely handling of both entry visa and residence permit applications for international students coming to Tilburg University for the foreseeable future.

All the Dutch universities who have incoming international students are faced with these same issues. The experiences of Tilburg University have been used as an example of the solutions that have been found to help ease the process of entry into the country for international students. ■

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