
Ministry of Justice and Security

Attn. The Minister of Justice and Security
Mr Grapperhaus
Postbus 20301
2500 EH Den Haag
The Netherlands

Date: 24th April 2020

To: Minister of Justice and Security, Minister of Education, Culture and Science & Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, also in copy to the Prime Minister

Subject: The effect of COVID-19 on students in or entering the orientation year for highly educated persons

Dear Ministers,

I am writing to you on behalf of the students and alumni at Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences. Wittenborg is a NVAO and internationally accredited, non-government funded, business school based in Apeldoorn, with satellite locations in Amsterdam and Munich. We are specialised in internationalisation of business and management in several fields, and currently offer English-taught bachelor and master programmes to a student community of just over 1000 students per year, who represent well over 100 different nationalities.

One of the aims of internationalisation of higher education in the Netherlands is to attract young higher educated talent to the Netherlands. One of the Netherlands' strong selling points in attracting these students is the possibility for non-EU graduates to enter a so-called 'search year' or 'orientation year' (zoekjaar) as a potential knowledge migrant. During this year, graduates are free to work in any sector, whilst trying to establish an employment contract at a company that employs such 'knowledge migrants'. As you probably know, this system has proven quite successful in attracting young, well-educated talent.

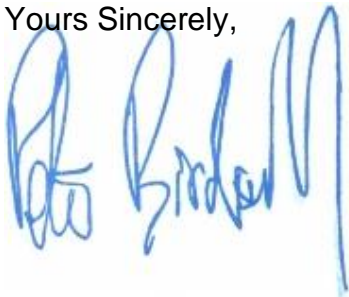
As executive of Wittenborg, we have been alerted to the fact that many graduates who are currently in their 'search year' are losing their jobs as a result of the corona crisis. Also, students who came to the Netherlands to study in the past years and are just about to graduate are desperate about their prospects of finding work. I need not spell out here what the current crisis means for people with temporary contracts, or to the current and future hiring policies of companies.

Students who lose their jobs now, or who enter the search year and cannot find employment within the specified time (1 year) due to the coronavirus, will have to leave the Netherlands, with empty hands, and the Netherlands loses a group of highly educated graduates that it will surely need in the future.

This aspect of the corona crisis is clearly causing a desperate situation for many international (non-EU) students and graduates, currently in a search year or about to enter one.

For that reason, I would ask you to consider extending the time that a current search year graduate has from 1 to 2 years, to allow this generation of international students the same opportunities as those who came before them and who are already benefiting from choosing the Netherlands as their study destination.

Yours Sincerely,



Peter Birdsall
Chair of the Executive Board
Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences
Apeldoorn, The Netherlands