



DISCUSSION

briefing note

Meeting	University Council
Meeting date	23-11-2017
Subject	state of affairs accommodation international students
Corsa number	-
Department	Board of the University
Handling advice	to be discussed
Summary (maximum of 10 lines)	The accommodation for new international students is analyzed: the actions before the start of the academic year, the explanation of the shortage of rooms, the realization of a temporary facility. Recommendations are made for next academic year.
Financial implications	no
If yes, coverage:	
ICT implications	no
Suggested decision/Advice	1. Make predictions on the number of new international students and their need for accommodation by SSH based on faculty prognoses as well as a central long term prognosis of numbers of students. 2. Ask SSH for sufficient capacity. 3. Cooperate with Gemeente and HG in order to realize a temporary facility for (international) students without a permanent room at/just before the start of the academic year, well in time before the summer. 4. Continue development of the website athomeingroningen.com. 5. Cooperate with HG and SSH to establish a service level agreement and to improve the quality of accommodation.
Follow up	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Management Council: for informational purposes only
Communication	



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1. Introduction

This memo gives information on the accommodation of new international students in the 1st semester '17-'18. The University of Groningen (UG) and the Hanze University (HG) have a long term arrangement with SSH to accommodate new internationals. UG and HG also cooperate with the Gemeente Groningen in policy issues and provision of information.

This year, more than in previous years, at the start of the academic year a shortage of rooms for international students occurred. It even led to the realization of a temporary accommodation facility at the Van Swietenlaan 23.

This memo describes the origins of the problem, the efforts of the UG and SSH this year and the solutions for the years to come.

2. Background

The national situation

Before going into the local situation, it is relevant to note that the problems in Groningen are not local but merely an example of the national situation. This summer several Dutch university cities had the problem of a severe mismatch between number of international students and number of available rooms. Often this mismatch was more severe as the local market of rooms for all students was more restricted.

This situation led to parliamentary questions to the Minister. At the end of September the Minister has answered the questions. An important issue in the debate was the role and responsibility of the universities. According to the Minister, Dutch universities have a responsibility 1) to inform the new international students about the local housing situation and procedures, 2) to signal problems in case of a shortage of rooms, 3) to have talks with the local municipality and housing corporations about solutions for these problems.

As analyzed below, in Groningen UG (and HG) have fully lived up to these responsibilities. In general, good cooperation between all parties (educational institutions, local government and local housing corporations) is essential to solve problems. Each of these parties has a role supplementary to the roles of others.

3. Analysis

A. Actions before the start of the academic year

At the start of the academic year '16-'17 many new international students in Groningen had not yet found a permanent room. The shortage of rooms was regarded as a peak problem, which would be solved within the first months of the academic year (which actually happened to the case). This problem was regarded to be a result of a shortage of rooms with SSH and a lack of information about acquiring a room on the local private market.

Several steps have been taken to prevent such a problem for the start of the new academic year. The most important steps were:

- a) UG and HG have asked SSH to postpone closure of the location Van Houtenlaan with 7 months (from July 1st 2017 to February 1st 2018). SSH has reached agreement on continuation of this location during the first semester with the owner, Nijestee. This meant that 175 beds could still be used during the first semester.
- b) SSH has obtained a new complex, realized by Nijestee, at the Anataresstraat/Zonnelaan with a total of 465 rooms for international students only. This meant an increase of the total capacity with 465 rooms (in units, independent rooms or studio's) with good quality. With realization of this complex SSH has met the demand made by UG and HG for the capacity at the start of the academic year.
- c) Gemeente, UG and HG have cooperated in realization of the website www.athomeingroningen.com with extensive information on housing in Groningen for students (and personnel) from abroad. The website was launched on July 11th; during the summer a team of students functioned as a service/help desk team for people with questions. From its start the new website is referred to as the most important source of information for new international students.



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B. At the start of the academic year: a temporary facility

At the Welcoming Ceremonies of UG and HG it became clear that many international students had not yet found accommodation and were dependent on all kinds of temporary solutions, often with extra costs.

This was reason to look for a temporary sleep in facility for international students. UG, HG and Gemeente have intensively cooperated in this search, on staff as well as board level. The search led to an agreement with Starck Vastgoed on the use of the building Van Swietenlaan 23 (a former office, also a former COA location) with a total of 100 beds (with new spring box matrasses) in rooms for 1, 2 or 3 people. The Boards of UG and HG guaranteed the use of 100 beds during 60 days. A student could use a bed for € 112 per week.

At the end of the second day of the academic year the social media were used to announce the start of this facility. Students could ask for additional information and subsequently apply for a bed at this facility. The first rooms/beds were slept in on Thursday night. With the efforts of a lot of persons and parties within one week a temporary facility had been realized.

In all, a little over 300 students from UG and HG have requested (and received) information on this facility. 150-200 students have actually applied for a stay. Requests were handled by order of receipt and order of preferred day of arrival at the facility. More than 100 students have actually slept in the facility for one or more weeks. The maximum use during one night was 91 beds. The average use from the start was over 80%.

On the one hand the temporary facility has proved to be a adequate and necessary service. On the other hand many international students managed to obtain a permanent solution during the first weeks of the year (see the difference between number of requests and number of applications, the number of cancellations after initial application, the number of departures after a period of stay).

The facility will be open (following the guarantees from UG and HG) until November 12th at least. After this period the owner wants to continue the facility for those students who want to remain there for some time (under conditions owner and residents have to agree on).

C. The capacity of SSH

The capacity of SSH in '17-'18 had expanded with 465 rooms due to the realization of the Upsilon complex. From August 1st 2017 SSH rooms were divided to institution and to group of students. The total capacity of SSH was more than 2000 rooms. It's the highest number of supply of rooms SSH (or its predecessors) ever had. The apartments for PhD students are no longer part of the reserved accommodation: SSH offers them as part of their regular accommodation. Also some rooms were occupied for students during the 2nd semester of '16-'17 and the 1st semester of '17-'18. The remaining rooms were offered to UG and HG students. In this a distinction was made between exchange students, bachelor and master students, UCG-students, short stay staff and PhD's. The table below gives the total number of rooms for all groups of students per institution.

Group	Period of stay	UG	HG	Total
Exchange	5 or 10 months	528	211	739
Bachelor/Master	10 months	718	121	839
UCG	10 months*	121	-	121
Staff/PhD	1+ months	107	-	107
Total		1474	332	1806

*UCG students have the option to prolong their stay during their second year.

In the summer a large part of the capacity is used for the participants of the summer schools of the UG.

Students had the opportunity to arrive (and rent a room) in early August. SSH let out 320 rooms per August 11th, to allow the international students to participate in the KEI-week. 1379 rental contracts started on August 28th, just before the Welcoming Ceremonies.

D. Demand of students

Analyzing the mismatch between supply and demand this summer also needs to be undertaken from the point of view of the demand, the number of students.



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First of all the number of new international students was higher than expected. Last spring the numbers for new master students from abroad were lagging behind. We now know that in 2017 the UG had 320 new international students more than in 2016. Also UG had 50 exchange students extra.

The actual number of new students is known at a late moment only. In case of international students a lot of issues determine whether a student will come or not, such as the admission decision from our university, the acquisition of the diploma, the choice between our university and other international universities one has applied for, the acquisition of sufficient financial means for the flight, tuition and stay and some times visa. Often these decisions are made at a late time.

At the same time – and contrary to the long term tendency from 2010 on – this year UG had more new Dutch students (+ 277). And due to a planned renovation the owner (Lefier) does not accept new students in one of its student flats (Selwerd 3, at the Duindoornstraat) and present tenants are asked to be housed elsewhere. This implies a temporary reduction of the total capacity for housing of students with more than 300.

A comparison is possible between the number of students housed by SSH and the numbers of newly registered students at our University. The total number of exchange students in the 1st semester was 1057. 528 of them were housed through SSH, this is just half of the total. The total number of new international bachelor and master students was 2248 (excl. UCG). 718 of them were housed by SSH (again, excl. UCG), this is 32 %. The percentages of students accommodated by SSH were significantly larger than last year. But in effect, the majority of regular students and half of the exchange students depended on the private market.

In Groningen no system exists to register the students who are still looking for a room. Neither SSH, Gemeente nor UG/HG have such a system. At the moment UG and HG decided to offer a temporary accommodation facility, students without a permanent room could ask for information. Based on these requests it is estimated that more than 300 students were still looking for a room at the start of the academic year. It is possible that students have decided to cancel their period of study in Groningen due to the lack of accommodation and have returned to their home country. The percentage of international students with deregistration in September was not higher than in 2016 or 2014. Deregistration can be caused by a number of reasons, such as wrong choice of study, acceptance by another university, finances, accommodation or social issues (homesickness).

As many international students – by own choice or from necessity – depend on a room on the private market, it is important that the private market is fully accessible. The website athomeingroningen.com gives all relevant information. The website refers to suppliers or internet sites. Unfortunately, much information in these environments is in Dutch only. Moreover, some providers or some students looking for new housemates explicitly give preference to Dutch students only. This is a very unwelcome situation with a negative influence on the entrance to the private market. It also neglects the advantages of having a housemate from another culture (widen up your horizon!). UG, HG and Gemeente can use their contacts with providers. Student organizations can use their channels to prevent this kind of discrimination.

4. Recommendations

To prevent a situation of lack of facilities for new international students in summer 2018, several steps need to be taken.

A. Prognosis of number of new international students

Each year UG (and HG) give a prognosis to SSH (before March 1st) about the number of beds required for new international students. In previous years this prognosis was based solely on information from the faculties. This year faculty prognoses will be combined with a university long term prognosis of number of all students (up to 2025). Such an university prognosis is



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based on past developments, the national predictions from the Ministry (Referentieraming) and University ambitions (Strategic Plan, Intentions on Internationalization). The long term prognosis allows for better predictions on a number of years, instead of just the next year.

B. Capacity of SSH

At this moment SSH is asked for additions to its supply of beds per February 1st to partly compensate the loss of capacity due to the closure of Van Houtenlaan. Also, SSH is asked to expand its capacity in summer 2018 to compensate for the beds at Van Houtenlaan, to compensate for the apparent shortage of rooms in summer 2017 and to meet the needs of a growing number of new international students. This expansion will be structural for a longer period. The more precise estimates will be given before March 1st.

At this moment SSH is investigating the possibilities. It is certain now that SSH's capacity will expand with the realization of a living tower at the Vrydemalaan. This tower is intended to accommodate the (first year) students of the University college, when UCG has moved to the Healthy Ageing Campus. As far as UCG does not need the full capacity of the new complex (appr. 240 beds) and as UCG won't be needing the present capacity at the Frascati complex, SSH will have an increase of capacity for international students. Realization of the Vrydemalaan complex will be in summer 2019 at the earliest.

In Groningen several major projects are undertaken for accommodation of young people. However, many projects consist of studio's with a rent that is too high for a (short stay) international student. Also projects take a long term of planning and realization. It is not sure if SSH can succeed in expansion of its structural capacity in 2018.

C. Temporary facility

Given the experiences at the start of the academic years in 2016 and 2017 and given the explanation of the shortage of rooms as a peak issue, it seems unavoidable to have a temporary facility at the start of the academic year 2018. Contrary to last year, we now can plan ahead and be prepared for this situation. UG, HG and Gemeente will start investigations for a sleep-in facility early. If possible, such a facility can be combined with facilities for students during the KEI-week (and the subsequent weeks) and does not need to be limited to international students only.

D. Information and assistance

In 2017 the website www.athomeingroningen.com has been launched. This site will be the major source of information for students (and staff) from abroad looking for information on housing in Groningen. It also issues warnings against malpractices. The site has been facilitated by the Akkoord van Groningen.

The Akkoord partners will be asked to continue support of the site (keeping information up to date), but also to enhance the site by including more specific information on (providers of) rooms for international students. Orientation on the situation in other university cities can provide new insights. Also talks (and agreement) with local providers are essential. Besides an evaluation a plan of action is prepared for to be presented at the Akkoord partners.

E. Improvement of quality

Spring 2017 the Boards of UG and HG have agreed on the recommendations from a report of the joint Task Force Service level and Quality Indicators. The report identified all accommodation aspects that are significant for UG and HG and their students, set standards (or a minimum for all these items), identified quality indicators and set a performance levels on these indicators in a longer term perspective.

SSH has agreed to mutual talks based on the recommendations. A first joint task is to investigate the possibility of a service level agreement.



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5. Conclusions

1. Make predictions on the number of new international students and their need for accommodation by SSH based on faculty prognoses as well as a central long term prognosis of numbers of students.
2. Ask SSH for sufficient capacity.
3. Cooperate with Gemeente and HG in order to realize a temporary facility for (international) students without a permanent room at/just before the start of the academic year, well in time before the summer.
4. Continue development of the website athomeingroningen.com.
5. Cooperate with HG and SSH to establish a service level agreement and to improve the quality of accommodation.

Given the significance of this topic, the variety of aspects and the parties involved, the Board has decided to establish a Task Force from the Bureau to coordinate all efforts from the university this year.