Expert group on ICTM & LOS

Minutes

28th March 2019, Phuket, Thailand

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MINUTES: Expert group on international Credit Transfer Mechanisms and Learning Outcome Systems – Meeting 28th March 2019, Phuket, Thailand

Attendees

Magalie Soenen (Belgium FL), Siti Zuliana Abdul Samad (Brunei Darussalam), Rosimah Matassim (Brunei Darussalam), Philippe Lalle (France), Alexandra Angress (Germany – DAAD), Inara Dunska (Latvia), Nabisah binti K. Kunheen (Malaysia), Fazliana binti Mohamed (Malaysia), Nongnuch Chunbandhit (Thailand), Phicharmon Sujatanond (Thailand), Wanwadee Sorhus (Thailand), Dr. Chantavit Sujatanond (SEAMEO-RIHED), Thanthakorn Phuangsawat (SEAMEO-RIHED ), David Urban (AES).

Caroline Hollela (Belgium WL), Marilena-Aura Din (Romania), Cloud Bai Yun (UK) asked to be apologised for not being able to attend this meeting.

Introduction

Magalie Soenen welcomes all attendees and expresses her thanks to the Office of Higher Education Commission of the Thai Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for supporting this meeting.

A short presentation of all attendees follows.

The agenda of the meeting is presented and adopted and the Terms of References (ToR) updated.

The minutes of the previous meeting in Cologne (20th November 2018) are adopted without significant modification by the Expert group (EG).

State of play of the working group

Regarding the new ToR revised at the meeting in Jakarta, the changes in some countries’ attendance were notified. There also only remains one contact person for each country.

Magalie Soenen reminds the content work, which was done at the meeting in Cologne. She refers to the presentation of Frederik De Decker (Belgium FL) on credits and grades and especially on grade conversion; this subject will be resumed by Magalie Soenen during this meeting.

The working group in November continued the revision of the compendium by giving feedback to the countries in order for them to be able to amend their own compendium. Magalie Soenen brings to the attention of the experts that this project is an on-going process, because not all countries have returned their revised compendium yet.

David Urban gives some feedback about the response rate of the templates. From the 23 compendia the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) received, 16 compendia[[1]](#footnote-1) were from Europe which corresponds to 52% of European countries. The remaining 7 compendia[[2]](#footnote-2) were from Asia corresponding to 33% of Asian countries.

Peer review of new individual contributions with the support of the expert group and discussion on adjusted country contributions

After the peer review process of new compendia, participants from Latvia, Germany, France, and Malaysia are invited to give feedback on their amended templates.

Regarding Latvia, it is reminded that updating the data will be a permanent work. Latvia suggest to send its adjustments that has been discussed.

Alexandra Angress suggests that Germany writes a short draft to show the purpose of the compendium. This contribution aims to clarify how to read the data included in the compendium for better comprehension.

Concerning Germany’s template, David Urban specifies that every section must be synthetic without too many details and without reference to other sections. There only needs to be one clarification regarding the preparation class that precedes the achievement of higher education. Alexandra Angress explains that this class takes place in Germany and that everyone can find more information on the website: <http://www.studienkollegs.de/home.html>.

It is also said that defining technical terms in a glossary are necessary in order to prevent any misunderstanding. For example, “short cycle” can refer to different cycles according to the country. It is suggested to add information on the glossary (prepared by SEAMEO RIHED) if necessary.

Concerning Malaysia’s compendium, the expert group notices that the first section is not in English. As there is no other version available, the table will be integrated in the online tool as is it.

For France there are some misunderstandings about certain terms that are used in the template which Philippe Lalle clarifies those issues.

Presentation of the draft of online tool

David Urban gives a presentation about the development of the online tool. Wishes and suggestions expressed during the last meeting in Cologne had been taken into account as far as possible: having a geographical approach for the front-end (entrance to the tool by a map), an internal search engine in English. The online tool should also be user-friendly and related to target group (professionals of HEIs). Regular updates of the content and next versions of the database should be possible. Besides challenges and the state of play of the project, some draft screen shots are presented.

At request, David Urban precises that the amended templates will be placed on the website.

It could be possible to create an account for every country, so they will have access to their own data and will be able to update it. This idea gives countries the advantage of being more autonomous and responsible for their own data. As a disadvantage the risk of disorganisation is introduced. Therefore nothing has been decided yet. Once the tool will be set up, it should also be decided how to proceed in the future with amended templates.

David Urban presents ASEM online tool with the domain’s name, decided in consultation with ASEM Expert Group, as following:[www.asem-education-hecompendium.org](http://www.asem-education-hecompendium.org) . This website aims to give a holistic overview of Asian and European systems, but also to provide information useful to compare data between countries. In order to facilitate the utilisation, the terms of glossary will be highlighted and the data updated permanently. The project’s follow up continues with the copy/past of the templates’ content into the tool and the adaptation of some templates. This work will be done by AES with the help of a trainee.

The expert group reacts after this presentation of the online tool. Alexandra Angress points out that there are other providers giving information about European systems like [Eurydice](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/home_fr) or the website of [Bologna Process](http://www.ehea.info/) and that it needs to appear in the templates to show awareness of its existence and to prevent repetition. David Urban suggests putting this information into the summary to avoid too much detailed templates.

Dr. Chantavit asks if it could be possible to select particular sections or countries and download this in pdf. David Urban answers that all technical aspect of the project are not defined yet but that the AES will study this possibility. The AES will also try to add the percentage of the number of students in HEIs in order to facilitate numerous comparison according to a suggestion from Alexandra Angress.

Once there will be a draft online version, members of the EG will receive the link.

Facilitate grade conversion between Asian and European countries

Magalie Soenen resumes the second part of the presentation of Frederik De Decker (Belgium FL) during the meeting in November about grade conversion (cf. also the minute of the EG of 20th November 2018 and presentation).

Even if countries have different grading scales, mobile students have the right to a fair conversion of their grades obtained during a period of study abroad. In order to achieve this right, each HEI should produce a grading table for each degree course within a specific subject area to ensure transparency of the grading culture and the accurate conversion of grades.

These grading tables are based on the number of students that passed a course, representing the distribution of the number of students for each grade. Grading tables should be based on ISCED-code (International Standard Classification of Education) to make it comparable between HEIs (e.g.: slide 14 and 15, ISCED-F code 023 Languages). However, in practice, even many European HEIs do not use ISCED-codes and are still using the system dating from before 2008. There is also no consensus on the use of credit system or grade conversion in other parts of the world.

The pragmatic five step approach that is used at the Ghent university since academic year 2018-19, uses grade conversion tables and methods from the most preferable step (1st step) to the less desirable step (5th step): 1st step: grade distribution table with ISCED reference group; 2nd step: grade distribution table at the level of the institution / programme / course; 3rd step: grade distribution table at country level, 4th step: grade distribution table based on the A-B-C-D-E scale and 5th step: no grade distribution, but there is often a communication in advance about the methodology for grade conversion to be used, preferably on the basis of clear agreements with the partner institution. In some cases, there is no possibility to translate grades. In these situations, the proposal is to use “pass/fail” without giving a local grade. As a consequence, these courses do not count to calculate a final grade.

Magalie Soenen launches a discussion asking what are the systems in the Expert Group’s countries, especially in Asia, and how we can facilitate the grade conversions between Asia and Europe.

Alexandra Angress explains that in Germany they use the Bavarian conversion table. However, German universities are not obliged to adopt this table and can apply their own table.

Philippe Lalle claims that in France they use grades from 0 to 20. France signed the Erasmus charter, as all other EU countries, which obliges France to adopt ECTS, but it is not the case yet.

Dr. Chantavit Sujatanond asks if it is possible to allow countries to adopt an equivalent system instead of force countries to apply the same system. Magalie Soenen replies that every institution can use its distribution, which means a normalized distribution for ISCED code.

Siti Zuliana Abdul Samad quotes that she is not sure if the ISCED-code is available in Brunei, so she needs to ask institutions.

Concerning Malaysia, Nabisah binti K. Kunheen explains that there is a national system available on passing grade. For the transfer of the credit, 80% of the course has to be the same. Conversion is made by the institution using ABC-system with at least C- to pass the exam. Most institutions apply the ABC system for courses and programmes.

Inara Dunska notices that in Latvia incoming Erasmus students have some troubles with credit transfer so they need to ask their university to find a solution. For the Latvian students studying abroad, the conversion is done case by case.

Nongnuch Chunbandhit says that in Thailand, credits are transferred instead of the grades according to a pass/fail system.

Grade conversion: a topic to work on?

In view of the differences between countries, Magalie Soenen wonders what we can do within the ASEM context. As an example she gives the idea of a cooperation between several ASEM countries to facilitate mobility.

Dr. Chantavit Sujatanond recommends developing something for all in the ASEM process instead of at national level, to prevent a certain waste of time. Magalie Soenen proposes to add a section in the compendium referencing the grading tables used in the country to give an example to the national legislation of what it could possibly be done.

Alexandra Angress thinks that the most important thing is trust and transparency. At an international level of cooperation, countries need to be sure that they can trust each other and information is provided. This way it could be interesting to put examples of good practices of grade conversion and ECTS on the website to motivate countries to improve their systems and promote exchanges between ASEM members. She continues saying that this topic has not been discussed yet, but according Dr. Chantavit Sujatanond, it is important to study this point because it can affect students studying abroad. Representatives of Malaysia agree as well that it is very institutional in every country and that it could be useful to build a framework which institutions can use as a non-binding support.

Magalie Soenen resumes what has been said, explaining that all the expert group members agree to determine grade conversion as a topic to work on by creating a document with good practice examples.

Common principles and input for Chairs’ conclusions (CC’s)

Concerning the membership to the expert group, there are some ASEM partners which did not answer to AES’s e-mail yet. It has been decided to send a last e-mail to Australia and ASEAN University Network and if there is no answer, then AES will take them out of the CC’s.

The Expert Group drafts the input for the CC’s.

Design of action plan for 2019-2020

The working programme for 2019-2020 is available on the website.

Magalie Soenen proposes to combine the meetings of the expert group to another activity (extra day of meeting) to go further into one specific subject with input of experts (cf. Peer learning activity). This way, it will be useful for everyone to travel for more than a one-day meeting. In addition, Dr Chantavit Sujatanond suggests to put materials on the website in order to makes countries want to join the meetings. All members of the expert group will be asked to propose 1-2 experts from their country to join for the extra day activity. The extra experts will be selected on basis of their expertise on the specific topic of the peer learning activity and be preferably a mix of people from governments, stakeholder organisations and/or higher education institutions. Also the option to expose specific subjects through a short video could be organised.

Another solution would be to give access to the meeting through internet with online streaming but this could be too complicated from a technical and temporal point of view (time difference between Europe and Asia).

The next meeting will take place in a European country around autumn. The location has not been determined precisely yet, but France might host the next meeting. The meeting will deal with the compendium, grading and learning outcomes.

The general theme is adopted by the Expert Group but the content needs to be further elaborated.

Magalie Soenen thanks everybody for participating on this fruitful meeting.

1. Austria, Belgium VL, Belgium FR, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, UK. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Australia, Brunei Darussalam, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)