Minutes ASEM Expert Group ICTM & LOS

22 October 2020

1. Introduction and adoption of the minutes of previous meeting - State of play of the working group and terms of reference

Tour de table

Magalie Soenen (Chair of the Expert Group; BE-FL) welcomes all the participants. She regrets that this meeting can only take place in a virtual setting this year, but also highlights that this presents an opportunity as there has never been as many participants in the Expert Group’s meetings before. Since there are many new faces, she suggests a quick tour de table to allow members and new comers to present themselves.

Adoption of agenda and minutes

The Chair asks Expert Group (EG) members whether there are comments on the agenda or minutes from the previous meeting. There none and both documents are hence formally adopted.

State of play of the Expert Group’s work

The Chair gives a brief update on the state of play of the Expert Group’s work and recalls what was done and agreed upon during the last meeting of the group in November 2019 in Lyon:

1. Peer-review of new compendium contributions.
2. Revision of the draft compendium (first version of the online tool).
3. Several presentations on grade conversion and grading. It was agreed that Belgium (Frederik De Decker) and Thailand (Bundit Thipakorn) would prepare a document with general recommendations and principles on this topic.
4. EG Action Plan 2019-2020: possible collaboration with UNESCO (Global Convention on Recognition and World Reference Levels) to highlight the complementary nature of activities and avoid overlaps.
5. One day dedicated to learning outcomes

She explains that similarly to the last meeting EG members will be asked to review new input the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) has received and that the new version of the ASEM Compendium for Higher Education will be presented. She informs the members that a **draft document on grade conversion** **and grading** has been prepared and that **connections were established with UNESCO representatives**. However, since the second day of this meeting had to be cancelled due to a lack of representativeness among EG members, the follow-up on point c) and d) cannot be discussed in this meeting, but will be on the agenda of the next one.

There are **no remarks or comments** from EG members.

Terms of Reference (ToR)

The Chair quickly goes through the ToR and recalls that the Expert Group is currently chaired by Belgium-Flanders with the assistance of a rotating co-chair depending on which country is hosting the meeting (e.g. the last meeting was co-chaired by France as the meeting was held in Lyon). She reminds members that the EG normally meets twice a year with the exception of this year as the Spring meeting had to be cancelled due to the COVID crisis. She hopes that the next physical meeting can take place in Asia and asks members to inform the Secretariat if their country is willing to host an EG meeting.

The Chair asks participants to check whether the **contact person i**n the ToR is still up-to-date and reminds them that even though there is only one contact person per country several representatives can attend the meetings. Nina Knops (DE) informs the group that Martin Schiffering is no longer the German representative for ASEM Education and that she is the new contact point. V.K. Siljo (India) informs the group that the Indian contact point (Dr Anamika) should also be updated. He asks to be written down as the Indian contact point and will communicate the new focal point later on by email together with an official letter from the Indian Ministry. The EG takes good note of these changes. The **updated documents will be sent to all members by the ASEM Education Secretariat.**

The Chair briefly reads the list of activities foreseen in the EG Working Programme for 2019-2020 set up in France during the last EG meeting and informs the group that the Working Programme for 2020 will be discussed under the last point of the agenda.

There are **no further reactions or comments** from the EG.

1. Presentation of the new « Compendium on Credit Systems and Learning Outcomes in ASEM partner countries » - ASEM Education Secretariat

The ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) presents the **new version of the ASEM Compendium** for Higher Education. Contrary to the previous version, the tool is no longer a standalone website but has been **integrated into the existing ASEM Education website** (<https://www.asem-education.org/>) so that all relevant information on ASEM Education activities, initiatives, projects, as well as all public meetings documents can be found in one place (“one-stop shop”).

The AES explains that due to technical reasons and after a lengthy discussion with the IT service provider, it was decided to **replace the interactive map by a list of countries** as keeping the map would have harmed the user experience. The Secretariat gives an **overview of contributions collected so far:**

* 19 country pages already available:
  + 14 of which were updated in 2020,
  + 5 are still from the 2018 batch;
* 6 countries just need to send the final version of their contribution before it can be uploaded on the website;
* 9 new contributions: 7 of which are to be reviewed during this meeting, the last 2 were submitted the night before to the Secretariat and the EG did not have sufficient preparation time to review them during this meeting;
* 18 countries have not submitted any input so far.

The AES proceeds with a live demonstration of the tool. Here is an overview of the main features presented:

* Compendium tab on the ASEM Education website with f**our categories:**
  + **About**: short description of the compendium (aims, data collection and update) based on the text drafted by Germany, which has only been slightly adapted to fit the new tool.
  + **How to use**: short video tutorial as requested by the EG (was not available in the previous version of the tool).
  + **Consult compendium**: list of ASEM countries with flags (only country pages available are clickable, others are displayed in grey). The whole compendium can be downloaded in a pdf format.
    - **Country pages** include an overview of the different chapters and sections. Clicking on the various titles redirects the user to the corresponding section.
    - **The blue arrow** at the bottom right can be used to scroll back to the top, images can be enlarged, key words have been highlighted and tables’ layout harmonized to facilitate comparison.
    - **A dropdown menu** called “Filter by country” above the overview allows the user to select the country/ies (s)he is interested in. Countries pages are automatically opened in new tabs. The user can compare the information by toggling between tabs or using the “windows side by side” feature.
    - Chapters and sections can be added at later stage if needed
  + **Glossary**: no universally applicable definitions, but rather a working reference. Definitions can easily be added/adjusted if needed.

1. Discussion and feedback on the compendium

Questions and feedback on the compendium

Alexandra Angress (DE) and Philippe Lalle (FR) highlight that the new version of the compendium is very well structured, intuitive and easy to navigate.

**Q:** V.K. Siljo (India) asks whether the country pages are updated by the countries or the Secretariat; **R :** (AES) The input is provided by the country representatives, but uploaded and updated on the website by the AES.

**Q:** V.K. Sijo (India) would like to know whether an automatic extraction of information provided on external websites, for example an Indian website, would be possible; **R:** (AES) Unfortunately, it is not technically possible.

**Q:** V.K. Siljo (India) asks more details on the comparison feature; **R:** (AES): The comparison is possible using the windows side by side feature (2 countries maximum) or by toggling between tabs when comparing 3 countries or more. Including a comparison module on the country pages would have required to remove the overview of chapters and sections, which is not advisable as it allows the user to quickly access the information it is looking for. (Chair): this feature was provided in the previous version of the tool but was not very user-friendly and did not allow for an easy comparison between countries due to the difference in the length of the descriptions provided among other things.

Discussion

Update procedure and frequency

EG members agree with the AES’ suggestion to **yearly update** the compendium with a **possibility for spontaneous intermediate review** by countries in case of big reforms as suggested by Frederik De Decker (BE-FL). The format to provide the updated version should remain flexible to account for the difference in inputs (e.g. update of figures, new table, section that needs rewriting). The AES will **remind** all partners to send their contributions by email as well as during ministerial meetings (SOMs and ASEMMEs).

Official launch and communication strategy

The AES asks EG members their opinion regarding the official launch of the ASEM Compendium for Higher Education and related communication strategy. Frederik De Decker (BE-FL) advocates for a **two-prong approach**: first **launch on a limited scale** (ASEM community) to try to **collect missing inputs before reaching out to a wider audience**. He considers that the real added value of the compendium is to provide information on many countries and believes launching the compendium on a larger scale, while so many countries are still missing would be counterproductive. Several members voice their agreement.

Missing country pages – new contact points

Both Frederik De Decker (BE-FL) and Alexandra Angress (DE) mention that a ‘mobilisation of shame’ (display of the compendium homepage with grey country flags) could serve as a wake-up call to countries, that have yet to provide some input. Alexandra Angress recommends **to use a culture-specific approach** to take into account countries’ specificities in terms of structure (e.g. several persons in charge of the same file) and hierarchy. She believes **working groups’ networks could also be activated.** She adds that on the long-term the compendium should be properly referenced in search engines. The AES replies that the ASEM Education website has already been optimized for search engines.

Magalie Soenen (Chair / BE-FL) asks whether **SEAMEO-RIHED could help get new contact points in the South-East Asian Region**. SEAMEO-RIHED representatives agree to help to relay the information through the regional platforms they are part of and will be in touch with the AES after the meeting.

Philippe Lalle (France) proposes t**o contact the representative in charge of the Bologna Follow-up Group.** The EG accepts this suggestion.

The AES suggests **to reach out to ENIC/NARIC centers** in the countries that have not answered previous requests to submit some input for the compendium. Many members voice their agreement. However, Baiba Ramina (LV) worries that new contact points might not have the right mandate to fill in the information in the name of the senior officials responsible for ASEM. The AES specifies that existing ASEM contact points will by no means be replaced, but that the idea would be to identify new contact persons for the countries that have been inactive lately in the ASEM Education Process.

Template review

The AES mentions that there are some inconsistencies in the input provided – some countries being very concise, others providing very detailed descriptions – and many repetitions in some contributions.

Frederik De Decker (BE-FL) stresses that **repetitions can be useful** if users want to read the sections independently and that difference in the description lengths accounts for cultural differences. V.K. Siljo (India) would like to restrict the characters allowed for each section. The AES reminds that the current template includes some indications regarding the length of the input to provide for each section, either in the form of concrete character limit or in the form of content boxes. The AES suggests to **specify the guidelines provided in the template to make it easier for new contributors** to understand what is expected of them and to refer them to existing country pages for examples. EG members agree with this compromise.

Additional peer-review in case of structural reforms

The Chair asks EG members whether they believe it is useful to peer-review again an existing country page in case of changes and how they would proceed (revision by email or during a meeting). Nina Knops (DE) suggests to **only organise an additional peer-review in case of structural reforms** (as opposed to figures updates and minor changes) and to contact members by email when possible. EG agrees with this proposal and decides to **review short structural changes by email and to discuss lengthier (not urgent) changes in the next scheduled meeting.**

Information provided in the ASEM compendium

Kristina Sutkute (LT) thinks that the ASEM Compendium for Higher Education stands out because it provides **more information on quality assurance, credit systems and learning outcomes than similar tools.** According to her, this specific information is usually only available in national languages. She argues that there is never too much information and that repetitions are helpful as highlighted by previous speakers. She insists on the **complementarity** of the various existing tools. She would like to keep historical information, as she believes it is helpful for practitioners when they are confronted with students still submitted to the older system.

Frederik De Decker (BE-FL) adds that the information provided is what practitioners need. Alexandra Angress (DE) agrees and would like to **add some testimonials and/or statements from practitioners** such as the one given by Kristina Sutkute (LT) to explain why the ASEM compendium is such a useful tool, thereby insisting on its USP (unique selling point).

Baiba Ramina (LV) agrees with Kristina Sutkute (LT) regarding the quality of information. She believes UNESCO and other stakeholders should be made aware that this type of information is available so that they can use it if needed. However, she thinks that **mixing historical and new information might be confusing** for most users even though it can helpful for people involved in quality assurance and recognition. Inara Dunska (LV) adds that while historical information might be useful in the case of credit transfers and mobility, it might be misleading for grades. V.K. Siljo (India) highlights that both the student community and professionals will use the compendium and that keeping archives could be valuable especially in the case of drastic changes in the systems in order to allow for comparison.

The Chair suggests that the AES reflects on technical possibilities to capture historical evolutions and follows up on this during the next meeting. The AES explains that there are two main possibilities from a technical point of view: integrating historical information in the relevant sections or adding a new chapter or section dedicated to this type of information. The first option requires to think about a way to distinguish between old and current systems. The AES asks the EG to further think about their preferred option and suggests to discuss this further during the next meeting.

1. Revision of the country contributions “Compendium on Credit Systems and Learning outcomes in ASEM partner countries”

EG members are divided into 3 groups taking into account the geographical distribution to make sure new contributions are reviewed by both Asian and European experts.

The first group peer-reviews contributions from the Republic of Korea, Bulgaria and Slovenia, the second group input from the Netherlands and Malta, while the third group is tasked with reviewing the country pages of Singapore and the Czech Republik.

Peer-reviewed contributions are sent to the ASEM Education Secretariat. The AES shall send them to the respective country contact points, asking them to amend their input following the EG’s feedback, before uploading them on the website.

1. Future perspective of the Expert Group (ASEM Education 2030 and Action Plan)

ASEM Education Strategy 2030 and Action Plan

The ASEM Education Secretariat briefly presents the ASEM Education Strategy 2030 and Action Plan. The AES is **planning interactive thematic workshops in January** to collect input for the Action Plan and invites all members to participate. It highlights that the thematic workshop on strategic objective 1 “Creating more transparency and mutual understanding” is particularly relevant for members of the EG. More information on this activity will be provided shortly to all ASEM Education partners and stakeholders by email.

Next EG meeting

The next EG Meeting will be held in **January**. The Chair recalls the items already in the action plan of the EG for 2020-21:

* Revision of new contributions to the ASEM Compendium for Higher Education.
* Discussion on recommendations related to grading systems
* Possible collaboration with UNESCO
* Organisation of a joint meeting with EG Digitalization for matters related to micro-credentials, digital badges, etc and possibility to add a new section on this to the compendium (long term objective)

AOB

Bundit Thipakorn (Thailand) mentions that a common workspace might facilitate cooperation and discussions in the EG. The AES answers that it would be possible to create a Microsoft Teams workspace if EG members feels it might be helpful. The AES will further discuss this possibility with the EG’s chair and follow up on this by email.

Conclusion

The Chair closes the meeting and thanks all members for their active participation.

Annex - List of participants

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| EG Chair – Belgium/Flemish Community | Magalie Soenen |
| ASEM Education Secretariat | Emilie Degueldre  Nadia Reynders |
| Austria | Ingrid Wadsack-Koechl |
| Belgium/Flemish Community | Frederik De Decker |
| Estonia | Janne Pukk |
| France | Philippe Lalle |
| Germany | Alexandra Angress  Nina Knops  Tim Maschuw |
| India | M.P. Poonia  V.K. Siljo |
| Latvia | Baiba Ramina  Inara Dunska |
| Lithuania | Kristina Sutkute |
| Malaysia | Fazliana binti Mohamed  Nabisah binti K Kunheen |
| Russian Federation | Iuliia Grinevich |
| Romania | Marilena Aura Din |
| SEAMEO RIHED | Duanmanus Waraphaskul  Kohei Yamada  Philip Masterson |
| Thailand | Bundit Thipakorn  Nongnuch Chunbandhit |
| United Kingdom | Fabrizio Trifiro |