

ASIA-EUROPE MEETING (ASEM)

Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1)

“Asia and Europe: Reboosting Interregional Cooperation on Education”

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Workshop C

“Approaches Of Digitally Enhanced Learning and Teaching At Higher Education Institutions With A Focus On The Use Of Microcredentials”

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Participants: ASEF, Belgium – French Community, Brunei Darussalam, ETF, EUA, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Malaysia, Romania, SEAMEO RIHED, Switzerland, Thailand, UNESCO, UNESCO UNEVOC.

The workshop is linked to the ASEM - expert group on digitalisation hosted by DAAD. Three panellists nourished the session (EUA - Thérèse Zhang); DAAD - David Akrami; Prof. Budit Thipakorn – KMUTT Technical University).

1- EUA - Thérèse Zhang

EUA (European University Association) is a stakeholder organisation of the ASEM Education process and represents 870 HEIs & rectors' conferences from European Higher Education Area countries (“the voice of universities at European level”). The main findings of the “[DIGIHE](#)” [Erasmus+ research project for digitally enhanced learning & teaching](#) were presented. It pursued the objective of strengthening HEI's strategic approaches for digitally enhanced learning & teaching (L&T) (DELT). Data have demonstrated that the acceptance to e-learning and blended learning is not a new concept (although not equally distributed across all HEIs) and is continuously growing. 70% of responding HEIs stated that digital learning is considered as a strategic priority while 88% of HEI share they have specific institutional strategies (>> 63% before). Half of them indicated being working on quality assurance process. In term of infrastructure & support, it shows, as an example, that digital library accesses exist but are not available for all students & staff, which indicates that we should not underestimate the digital literacy. The responsibility of digital infrastructure support is shared between institutional and faculty levels.

The last 5 years' Top3 impact of digital on L&T are: the innovation in T&L; the flexible L&T provision and the growing data collection on student learning. It also has a big impact on internationalization. The Top 3 barriers shared are the lack of staff resources; funding opportunities and the difficulty of having a concerted approach for the entire institution. To conclude, digital can also enhance lifelong learning provision by reaching more easily than before a diverse population, including adult students. On the other hand, it raises many new concepts to define commonly (across institutions, in the country...) and a risk of over-regulations (how to define short/non-degree courses; partnership with non-traditional education providers; how to define a common vision with all person dealing with LLL in one single HEI...?). Finally, open issues and concerns were presented to this gradual evolution to digital L&T: do the existing frameworks fit to digital learning (regarding quality assurance and recognition)? How to address academic integrity, ethics, security and privacy policies (at HEIS, national and EU level)? How to deal with the variety of interpretations of some concept (ex. “blended”? “Hybrid”)? How to deal with staff resistance and “teaching fatigue” after the pandemic (cf. volunteer training for digital skills and competences)...

2- DAAD – David Akrami

The panellist presented recent developments in Europe and Germany on micro-credentials. He firstly recalled the vision of the European Commission to tackle “skills gaps” (linked to today’s pace of knowledge development) as part of the objective to achieve the European Education Area by 2025. In the meantime, micro-credentials contribute to other EU/EHEA policies: the European Skills Agenda, the European Digital Action Plan, the EHEA Rome Communiqué 2020 and the EU Council Recommendation of 2022 on a “European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning & employability”. Nowadays, the path from education to work is no longer linear and micro-credentials (which might have a digitalisation component) are seen as reskilling/upskilling tools. The European Council recommendation proposed a common definition, standard elements & principles at European level and covers several sectors (education & training; formal, non-formal and informal context). It invites stakeholders to use micro-credentials in a coherent way and asks member states to take support measures in this direction. A roadmap to reach a common agreement & definition will conclude with adoption of principles during the next EHEA ministerial conference in 2024. Subsequently, some insights on the German experience were shared. From an initially cautious perspective regarding micro-credentials, Germany has followed a step-by-step approach by gathering experiences & knowledge through several research/collaborative projects (e.g working group of the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK), DAAD surveys ...). Survey results showed that universities are increasingly addressing the issue and are implementing micro-credentials (or at least discussing their uptake). Interestingly, it has been observed that a gap is opening up between universities and universities of applied sciences: with basically no significant difference in the 2022 survey; the results of 2023 now show a stronger increase in the use of micro-credentials by universities (50 > 78%). As this question has been raised by a participant, one panellist assumed that it might be linked to the fact that some universities are involved in the

“European universities initiative” which drives many innovations and collaborative approaches. Another assumption is that micro-credentials might be considered by universities as an opportunity to formalize their non-degree education/lifelong learning provision (and make it visible >< VET providers). It is then confirmed by the survey that micro-credentials are principally used in lifelong learning /further education context in Germany. Micro-credentials size/range of 1-5 ECTS is considered as appropriate (but no homogeneity in the answers). The survey also assessed the need of regulations of micro-credentials in some areas (which are presented in more details in slides). In conclusion, more than being an ad hoc solution to the COVID situation, micro-credentials are also seen as a useful tool to accompany internationalization and offer (more) inclusive opportunities by getting in touch with students who might not have been considered for mobility/internationalization activities. Finally, several countries, included Germany, already offered learning provisions comparable to micro-credentials (ex. Certificates) and in some cases, a re-labelling is in progress.

3- KMUTT technical university (Thailand) - Prof. Bundit Thipakorn

The Professor presented higher education practices with micro-credentials in Thailand, which are mainly developed through their lifelong mission. Digital is seen as essential in this changing world. The KMUTT4Life project within the KMUTT technical university is a higher education framework which contributes to answer to labour market needs. It proposes solutions to respond to market disruptions through the learning continuum. Which is no longer linear (from school to higher education to employment to education...). The “learning” is more highlighted than the “teaching”. A new kind of credential is provided, linked to transversal themes and 21st century competences framework mixing several competences (economy, social, intercultural ...). The framework aims competence achievements in line with performance accountability. The training aims to make people able to deal with several jobs and to serve contemporary careers (>< long time career). In this framework, micro-credentials are used as a tool to reach competences and credibility. The credential is translated into a digital badge (which gathers information on the profile of the learner) & learning outcomes which are stackable. The credential type goes from degree to competences credentials. The following discussion raised the fact that micro-credentials in Thailand were not included in the national qualification framework (dedicated to degrees). While degrees do have to be ratified by Ministry, micro-credentials do not. An actual challenge rely on the recognition/valorisation of micro-credentials in the public sector, but also in the valorisation of the experience of some individuals willing to enter/return at university. One tool raised by a panellist is the “recognition & validation of prior learning” which might assess competences and, in certain cases/countries, awards you a degree equivalent to the proven experience. It has also been raised that micro-credentials should not enter in competition with traditional degrees, but that solutions have to be found in order to be recognize in lifelong learning settings (and be stackable or linked to traditional degree). The sessions conclude with a wrap-up captured by participants input on post-it:

- *Need for a mutual understanding and definition*

- *“competence, learn and earn”*
- *Complimentary approaches in Europe and Asia*
- *Digitalisation is the priority topic for the future of universities*
- *Opportunities to evolve*
- *How to promote mobility in micro-credentials programmes, when we also wanted to apply digitalisation? E.g. for the unfortunate individuals who cannot afford to travel overseas, they opt for MOOCs. How do we promote mobility in these cases?*
- *Is micro-credentials a conflictual approach of the long-term and short-term missions of HEIs?*
- *Micro-credentials as tools for flexible LLL*
- *Contrast between the absences of graduate employability in the 2 European presentations, sharp focus in the Thai one*
- *Focus on learner & differentiate ‘every level’ from LLL*
- *Dynamism! Adaptability!*
- *Working towards “inter-connections” between micro-credentials, modes of digital learning*
- *How can we improve in TVET following the registered success in HE?*

