



POLICY BRIEF

NUMBER 8

8 AUGUST 2018

BOOSTING ASEAN STUDENT MOBILITY

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IN CREDIT TRANSFER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the eighth in a series of Policy Briefs published by the EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE) project, a four-year initiative by the EU and ASEAN to support harmonisation and boost the quality of Higher Education (HE) systems across Southeast Asia.

This policy brief summarises the outcomes of the SHARE What Works Conference held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in May 2018. The event attracted over 150 stakeholders, with representatives from 16 ASEAN and European countries, including high-level education officials, university leaders, international experts in higher education and credit transfer, as well as ASEAN students.

The objective of the conference was to support and enhance the exchange of best practice on academic credit recognition in order to strengthen student mobility throughout the ASEAN region. The conference obtained the certification label “EHEA 2018 – France and Europe in Higher Education¹”, awarded by the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. This certification illustrates Europe’s interest in the SHARE programme and in developing links with Southeast Asia. As highlighted in the Paris Communiqué (25 May 2018)², it is important to reinforce cooperation with other regions in the fields of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The What Works conference was the culmination of SHARE’s activities for developing a pilot mutual credit transfer system

(CTS) for ASEAN. Building upon existing credit transfer systems in the region, SHARE’s CTS aims to facilitate the comparability and compatibility of study programmes and enhance intra-ASEAN and ASEAN-EU student mobility through the implementation of tailor-made mechanisms and tools. An online platform, where Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and students can log in, acts as a facilitator of the mobility process. For students, it displays relevant information in the preparation of their mobility. For HEIs, it determines a set of documents that both students and they need to complete before, during and after the mobility period, leading to the transfer of credits.

The overarching recommendation from this conference is that universities, with the support of governments across ASEAN, should actively follow the guidance and advice contained in the recently-published SHARE Credit Transfer Handbook, with a view to setting up a robust and compatible credit transfer system across the region. Boosting ASEAN student mobility, by broadening opportunities for student participation through mobility scholarship schemes, should become embodied in ASEAN higher education thinking, underpinned by agreed frameworks for qualifications and quality assurance, and a flexible credit transfer scheme, thereby accelerating the future development of the regional higher education and socioeconomic area.



CONTEXT AND ISSUES AT STAKE

Student mobility is recognised as a key component of international competitiveness, essential for nurturing human capital for economic and social growth. The number of students gaining an international study experience in higher education has escalated from under a million, at the end of the 1970s, to around 4.6 million today. This figure is anticipated to reach 8 million by 2025. A principal driver in this trend is the link between mobility and employability. A 2016 survey³ revealed that 60% of employers around the globe value international study experience, with 80% actively seeking to recruit students with such experience. This backed up an earlier report from the European Commission (2014), which found that 92 % of employers valued the typical ‘transversal’ skills that study abroad develops.

Within the ASEAN context, as the benefits of intra-regional mobility have become more apparent, the level of student mobility increased from 166,000 in 2009 to 220,000 in 2013. As part of the drive to boost ASEAN student mobility, SHARE and other related initiatives such as the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme led by the Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO–RIHED) and student mobility programmes implemented by the ASEAN University Network, have actively promoted mobility opportunities.

The ASEAN Europe Credit Transfer System (AECTS), conceptualised by SHARE, has supported SHARE Scholarships. A total of 400 scholarships have been awarded since 2016, enabling students from eight ASEAN countries to undertake short-term study in 32 ASEAN universities, with a further 100 scholarships for ASEAN students to study in eight universities in Europe. More than 1,400 students, 250 international relations officers, and 42 ASEAN and EU HEIs are now using the SHARE online platform⁴ and its fully digitalised mobility tools, enabling students to apply for SHARE scholarships, prepare their mobility period, and facilitate credit transfer. Together with the recent launch of the SHARE Credit Transfer Handbook, support is available to improve communication between sending and receiving HEIs and students interested in studying abroad.

AECTS is an inclusive process facilitating credit transfer and forming an arena where institutions communicate and cooperate to enhance student mobility experiences. Practical benefits can be derived by streamlining visa processing and placing the student at the centre of the mobility and learning process. SHARE values mobility as a driver for the improvement of the quality of higher education and above all, a gateway to student development and socio-economic inclusion across Southeast Asia. Student mobility is the corner stone of internationalisation in higher education. In order to be successful, it requires commitment from higher education institutions as well as from governments and regional supporters.

SHARE RECOMMENDS

1. **Reinforcing political commitment towards the organisation of mobility.** The role of ASEAN Member States is key for harmonisation and internationalisation to grow. Intra-ASEAN recognition requires political will and is essential for building and promoting the ASEAN community.
2. **Helping to create a ‘through train’ of opportunity, by fostering lifelong learning,** where students are stakeholders in preparing the next generation of human capital. Accommodating the free movement of students needs to be reflected in the transfer of credits, by switching to an outcomes-based approach in order to validate their newly acquired skills and knowledge.
3. **Bolstering trust between partners.** Internal quality assurance is necessary in order to build trust, particularly in ASEAN where differences between countries regarding the maturity of their HE quality systems may be significant, notably with regards to CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam). Building greater trust between HEIs will be reflected in the mutual recognition of their programmes. Quality assurance, whether at programme or institutional level, is critical for establishing Learning Outcomes that demonstrate students’ knowledge, hard and soft skills, and values.

4. Meeting international Standards. Supporting the efforts undertaken by CLMV countries to meet international standards including building on active Memoranda of Understanding and increasing the quality and quantity of English-taught programmes. Mobility relies on a well-embedded International Relations Office (IRO), robust international support services and committed academic staff. Regular communication between university departments maximises the scope for programme flexibility and facilitates the development of clear policies on credit transfer. This favourable environment improves universities' credibility and their attractiveness towards international students.

5. Promoting international exchange programmes to students. The attractiveness of student mobility opportunities may be boosted by administrative staff within a university's International Relations Office, who can share their knowledge on programmes and provide induction and coaching for international students. Students and alumni are potentially great ambassadors of their university and country, offering a pragmatic approach to problem solving by mentoring visiting students. Building a user-friendly campus with an international outlook creates a home from home environment that reassures mobile students.

6. Facilitating mobility at the programme level through an appropriate curriculum. Comparability should be sought rather than the replication of content. Institutions should create common grounds to harmonise programmes instead of striving for uniformity. The cultural dimension is also important, as creating joint curricula with international partners is not a technical problem. It is more a question of cultural approach, where each partner has to find coherence and develop a common understanding of objectives. In order for recognition and credit transfer to take place, institutions need to adopt a flexible approach and trust their partners regarding the quality of their education. Opportunities exist to create new curricula specifically designed for enhancing student mobility. The approach may require a new way of thinking for HEIs that goes beyond their existing frameworks. Emphasis should be placed on creating a study plan that allows mobile students to pursue the normal course of their studies upon return.

Curriculum design must facilitate mobility. Examples of curriculum innovation might range from the integration of a 'mobility window' in the programme, to developing a full joint degree with if problems in delivery arise (cancelled courses).

7. Securing long-term commitment through Institutional Partnerships. The quantity of partnerships is not the only measure of internationalisation. Other important elements are the quality of partnerships and the shared understanding of the reasons behind a partnership. Partnerships need to be evaluated periodically in order to pursue only active and fruitful cooperation. Commitment and engagement is essential for active partnerships, necessitating the involvement and common understanding of the entire university community. The management of partnerships is central, not peripheral, to mutual added value. Collaboration between academics is a fundamental starting point for further cooperation and mobility, as trust is built on the human dimension. This requires good staff knowledge of the international HE landscape.

8. Integrating credits back home for the fully-fledged recognition of mobility abroad. Attention should focus on the equivalence of course content to facilitate student mobility and to overcome possible obstacles linked to the national regulations of qualification agencies, or to the need to adhere strictly to equivalences in terms of contents, contact hours and/or learning outcomes. This requires building the institutional will to allow for flexibility and to interpret national standards with an open mind, to facilitate mobility. Relevance and equivalence can be interpreted through the convertibility of grades between institutions, using statistics or conversion tables. The SHARE Credit Transfer Handbook provides guidance on best practice. A well-functioning credit transfer system and grade conversion system encourages the diversity of courses instead of the strict equivalence or replication of courses that students can follow at their home institution. The credit transfer system must be transparent regarding the process, with a clear designation of roles between the IRO and faculties and of responsibility for grade and credit conversion.

REFERENCE

¹European Higher Education Area (EHEA) composed of 48 country members as of May 2018.

²<http://www.ehea2018.paris/Data/ElFinder/s2/Communique/EHEAParis2018-Communique-final.pdf>

³QS Global Employer Survey

⁴www.share-asean.org

PREVIOUS SHARE POLICY BRIEFS (AVAILABLE AT WWW.SHARE-ASEAN.EU)

Policy Brief 1 – Towards Greater Harmonisation of Higher Education in ASEAN. May 2016.

Policy Brief 2 – Enhancing Internationalisation in ASEAN: Credit Transfer Systems and Student Mobility. October 2016.

Policy Brief 3 – Towards a Shared Understanding of Quality Assurance: Policy Recommendations for Implementing a Regional QA Framework in ASEAN. January 2017.

Policy Brief 4 – Degree Structures and the Harmonisation of Higher Education in the ASEAN Region. February 2017.

Policy Brief 5 – Making National Qualifications Comparable Across ASEAN: The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework. May 2017.

Policy Brief 6 – Studying Abroad, Becoming ASEAN: Regional Student Mobility As a Driver of the ASEAN Community. August 2017.

Policy Brief 7 – Capitalising on ASEAN: Internationalisation Strategies for CLMV Universities. December 2017.

SHARE IS PROUD TO SUPPORT 51 YEARS OF ASEAN AND 41 YEARS OF ASEAN-EU RELATIONS IN 2018

SHARE, the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region, is a four-year initiative by the EU and ASEAN. Launched in Jakarta in May 2015, SHARE aims to support ASEAN in harmonising regional higher education by sharing European expertise. It does this through strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing the quality, competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education for institutions and students, and thereby contributing to a closer ASEAN community. SHARE is implemented by a consortium of Europe's major international education agencies, led by the British Council and comprised of Campus France, DAAD, Nuffic, ENQA, and EUA. More information on SHARE at www.share-asean.eu.