



POLICY BRIEF

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TOWARDS GREATER HARMONISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASEAN

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIRST AND SECOND SHARE POLICY DIALOGUES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the first of a series of Policy Briefs issued by the *EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region*, or SHARE programme, a four-year initiative by EU and ASEAN to support harmonisation and raise the quality of higher education (HE) systems in Southeast Asia. While future Policy Briefs will focus on individual policy issues, this document serves as a sectoral overview.

SHARE Policy Briefs will help inform strategic decision making across ASEAN in support of the construction of a regional HE space as a policy priority. Although it requires relatively small public funding, a reform of this nature will have a crucial impact on the transition to knowledge economies and enhancing national and regional competitiveness.

The link between mobile and internationally minded young talent and achieving the

ASEAN Community's overall aspirations relies heavily on the connectivity and comparability between national structures, systems and agreements. SHARE Policy Briefs will convey the key messages from international higher education experts regarding the operational requirements of initiatives on Quality Assurance, Qualifications Frameworks and Credit Transfer Systems that will ultimately drive ASEAN's competitiveness in a complex global higher education landscape.

A flagship *ASEAN Scholarship* scheme for credit and degree mobility of students, sponsored by the 10 ASEAN Member States, should be at the very heart of ASEAN's approach to building a regional HE space, encouraging students to develop an ASEAN identity and mindset that will empower them to act as agents of change in boosting regional integration.



CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Developing higher education (HE) in ASEAN has a national and a regional dimension, and ASEAN leaders recognise that education is central to the social and economic development of ASEAN Member States and ASEAN as a whole. Building modern higher education systems in the region will be central to states' transition to knowledge economies, as it will allow the young populations of ASEAN to be integrated into the rapidly evolving labour markets. If this transition is managed successfully, it will ensure further economic growth and international economic competitiveness.

With over 6,000 HE institutions and more than 15 million enrolled students across ten countries, the HE landscape in ASEAN is very diverse. The reliance upon sending students beyond Southeast Asia for study, prevalent amongst many ASEAN societies, entails high costs and limits the ability of home HE institutions to build capacity and quality across national systems. Building a harmonised HE space in the ASEAN region will mitigate these effects and extend opportunities to a diverse student body from varied social and educational backgrounds.

In responding to this challenge of educating students with different individual motivations and talents, while taking into account rapid changes in the labour market and the need for active citizenship, policy makers across ASEAN and universities must work together to embrace student centred learning and flexible study career paths.

A well-developed regional HE space is also of great significance for the project of building an ASEAN Community because it will instil an ASEAN identity in the leaders of tomorrow and function as a catalyst in accelerating ASEAN's political, economic and socio-cultural development.

ASEAN leaders have long acknowledged the importance of building a regional higher education system, inspired by the highly successful European Higher Education Area and ERASMUS scheme and have put the necessary elements in place. Today, all elements necessary for a regional higher education system exist in Southeast Asia: a governance structure (ASEAN Summit, ASED and SOM-ED, supported by the ASEAN Secretariat), well-functioning universities in all ASEAN member states, regional university networks under AUN and SEAMEO, regional quality assurance and qualifications frameworks, regional student mobility schemes (AIMS, AUN), and a credit transfer system (ACTS).

It is not an intended option to drive policy in a single direction to make national systems identical. The focus is to explore synergies and advise upon policy and strategy that will enhance connectivity and comparability in ASEAN Higher Education.

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education adopted by ASEAN Leaders in 2015 encapsulates the vision as well as the collective ambition to accelerate this process. This SHARE Policy Brief provides recommendations informed by the experiences within the European Higher Education Area, for the effective management of this process by regional and national policy makers, and university managers.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ASEAN LEADERS, ASEAN MINISTERS OF EDUCATION (ASED), AND ASEAN SENIOR OFFICIALS ON EDUCATION (SOM-ED)

1. Building a regional higher education system should be a policy priority of ASEAN Leaders, ASED and SOM-ED. The system should harmonise existing systems and frameworks while preserving the distinctive cultural specifics of national HE systems. The European Bologna Process will be a useful benchmark in this regard. All necessary elements for building an effective regional HE system in ASEAN exist, but they must be further developed, adapted to fit the context and harnessed by political and financial commitments.
2. Regional consultation mechanisms should be built to include all relevant stakeholders, e.g. policy makers, universities, students and industry.
3. An "ASEAN Scholarship" scheme for credit and degree mobility of students, sponsored by the 10 ASEAN Member States, should be at the heart of ASEAN's approach to building a regional HE space. The "ASEAN Scholarship", for which the European ERASMUS scholarship may signpost key success indicators, could encompass existing regional scholarship schemes, thereby enhancing their profiles and effectiveness. The "ASEAN Scholarship" should have an inspirational name and should be promoted throughout the region. The "ASEAN Scholarship" will be kick-started with SHARE support from 2016 and will require small but stable co-funding from all ASEAN Member States from 2017 onwards.
4. Comparability of qualifications' structures through the usage of learning outcomes will facilitate student mobility and sharing of quality standards.

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Therefore, commitments to implementing robust regional quality assurance and qualifications reference frameworks should be further substantiated to encourage ASEAN member states to benchmark and align their national systems and structures. Follow-up mechanisms should be established in order to monitor the progress at national levels.

5. Agreement should be reached on developing one regional central credit transfer system for the "ASEAN Scholarship", which shall later become compatible with systems outside the region, e.g. ECTS or ASEAN+3, to enable inter-regional connectivity.
6. The ASEAN Secretariat should be mandated to coordinate the regional HE system and administer the "ASEAN Scholarship". Working modalities between ASEAN Secretariat and SEAMEO shall be agreed upon.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO UNIVERSITIES IN ASEAN

1. Build a distinctive regional outlook into the student experience and internationalisation strategy of universities, and substantially increase inner-regional student mobility. Support should be provided to CLMV countries to ensure that inner-regional student mobility in ASEAN is as balanced as possible.
2. Further develop and share the transparency tools such as quality assurance and qualifications frameworks or credit transfer systems to enhance cooperation and exchange at regional and national levels. This will help to realise the ASEAN HE space in a deeper way – exploiting tools and frameworks at the level of universities, in turn fostering



- more regional discussion on learning outcomes and credit transfer. This will impact upon recognition of degrees and student mobility through credit recognition across borders.
3. Student-centred learning (SCL) is crucial for the development of teaching and academic programmes, but also with regards to regional and national instruments that have been put in place (ARQF, QA). The European Students' Union principles of SCL can act as a useful reference point. Institutional processes for defining and assessing learning outcomes require more sharing of best practice across ASEAN, as will support for teacher training.
 4. Involving students in university governance processes and in the design and review of curricula is a key element of building quality driven, world-class higher education across ASEAN.
 5. Develop higher education curricula based on learning outcomes to make them regionally and internationally comparable. Institutional processes and methodologies to do so can be developed jointly in ASEAN, involving students and industry in the process.
 6. Enhance the development of university-industry linkages to equip graduates with skills relevant to industries that operate regionally or internationally.

Building modern higher education systems in the region will be central to states' transition to knowledge economies and will ensure further economic growth and international economic competitiveness. Utilising the ASEAN dimension will not only benefit national development, but foster the ASEAN leaders of tomorrow.

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, EP-Nuffic, ENQA and EUA. More information on SHARE at www.share-asean.eu