



White Paper

Strategies to strengthen collaboration in Higher Education between Europe and South East Asia

September 2010



Project funded by the European Commission – Erasmus Mundus Programme

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. THE VISION	4
2.1 The relationship between the universities of Europe and South East Asia.....	4
2.2 The ACCESS perspective	5
3. THE DIAGNOSIS	7
3.1 State of the art EU-SEA relations in Higher Education.....	7
3.2 Key challenges to be addressed	9
4. PROPOSAL	11
4.1 Pre-conditions to opening up towards cooperation and integration	11
4.2 Proposed actions	12
5. NEXT STEPS.....	13
ANNEX: THE ACCESS PROJECT	14

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this document are solely those of the ACCESS Project, and are, under no circumstances, those of the European Commission. While due care has been taken to provide data which is both accurate and up-to-date, the ACCESS consortium will not be held liable for decisions made by the user based upon the data, analysis, conclusions and recommendations contained in this publication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ACCESS Green Paper aims at stimulating consultation and reflection among relevant stakeholders and, in particular, decision and policy-makers from Europe and South East Asia on strategies to enhance cooperation between the two regions in the field of Higher Education.

The Green Paper is articulated in three main sections: vision, diagnosis and proposal. The ACCESS vision on cooperation is provided first, followed by the diagnosis on the current situation as emerging from desk research and consultation with stakeholders. Finally, practical proposals are made to enhance cooperation between the two regions in the field of Higher Education. These proposals will be discussed with stakeholders and policy makers of Europe and South East Asia during 2010 and will feed the ACCESS White Paper, containing recommendations to enhance cooperation in Higher Education between the two regions.

The present document was conceived by the ACCESS consortium with the contribution of a number of stakeholders, and aims at providing a direct added value both to the EU-SEA ongoing cooperation process in the field of higher education and to European and – especially - South East Asian students and stakeholders.

2. THE VISION¹

2.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITIES OF EUROPE AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

Many European and South East Asian past and ongoing initiatives of regional integration (with their strengths and weaknesses) have acknowledged the internationalisation challenge posed by the XXI century as well as the impact of this global process on local systems, in educational terms as much as political and economical; the latter, moreover, dramatised by the recent financial crisis.

From this perspective, all major stakeholders involved in regional integration processes have generally pointed out the importance of enhancing further cooperation mechanisms in Higher Education in order to meet the challenges of globalisation. In this context, student and teacher mobility, mutual accreditation systems and recognition of qualifications, quality assurance and the exploration of new forms of mobility and knowledge exchange supported by new technologies are key elements when re-thinking and re-designing the education policy in the context of the bi-regional relations.

The transformation process that nowadays takes place in European universities, running under and beyond the Bologna Process², is a useful experience for reflection. We observe how higher education institutions work towards adapting their programmes and curricula to the social needs.

This growing diversification is working with the progressive integration of the different forms of education, based on a higher flexibility of the programmes and on increasing students mobility. Thus, it aims towards convergence, taking into account the diversity of contexts, learners' groups and the views of the stakeholders involved in the process.

Analysing what is working well and what is not working so well in the Bologna Process can favour regional integration processes in South East Asia and, at the same time, it can enhance a systemic approach to the existing cooperation relationships between European and South East Asian universities.

The significant differences among SEA countries, also in terms of Higher Education systems, should not be underestimated and the difficulties encountered in the Regional and sub-Regional integration processes are a clear indicator of the complexity of the task; but waiting for "regional integration" to be accomplished before accelerating the international integration process might reveal to be a losing strategy: **the two processes should progress in parallel and learn from each other "what works where and why"**.

¹ Adapted from C. Dondi, G. Alberti et al., 2008 "Contribución A Una Estrategia Innovadora Para Implementar El Espacio Común De Educación Superior – Alcúe", VALUE Green Paper http://www.value-project.eu/value/images/GreenPaperVALUE_ES.pdf.

² The Bologna Process was launched in June 1999 with the Bologna Declaration (http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/990719BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.PDF). It is an intergovernmental initiative subscribed by 46 Ministries of Education and based on cooperation with higher education institutions, students, staff and international organisations. The Process aims at creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to allow harmonisation among education systems, transparency, mutual recognition of titles, mobility of academics and, more in general, to improve the European Higher Education performance in the globalised world. More information at http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm.

2.2 THE ACCESS PERSPECTIVE

As a starting point, we consider universities as natural champions of a “non traditional integration among different countries and regions of the world”, in other words, an integration that goes beyond mere economic and trade relationships and that implies knowledge creation and sharing in a perspective of mutual recognition as well as contribution to the development of society in an international perspective. Based on this shared vision, the ACCESS Project attempts to contribute to enhancing cooperation among the HE systems of the two regions through specific actions for the constitution of a bi-regional community founded on common values, reciprocity principles and mutual recognition.

ACCESS considers students, researchers and professors’ **mobility** to impact positively in terms of institutions’ reciprocal **knowledge**, and to contribute to the establishment of praxes of mutual recognition of titles and qualifications.

Further mutual recognition increases **trust** among the parts and constitutes a step forward in the search for the best modalities to foster synergies and increase cooperation. Mobility itself should be framed into a broader strategy for scientific cooperation among the institutions involved in exchange and mobility programmes, and turn into a starting point to increase the **transfer of knowledge and technology**.

The ACCESS perspective therefore, hinges on the improvement of the cooperation in higher education between the two regions.

To achieve this goal, ACCESS considers the following four elements as essential:

- 1) A systemic and permanent/long term approach in order to integrate and articulate the many – and not always collaborating – ongoing initiatives in both regions, so to maximise the impact of Higher Education cooperation within South East Asia and between Europe and this region;
- 2) Encouraging collaboration and long-term partnerships among all levels of society, starting from academics and universities and including companies, cultural associations and other civil society bodies: however ambitious it may sound, it traces a direction, given that the promotion of European universities alone is not enough, neither is the right approach, to build an inclusive Higher Education area across EU and SEA.
- 3) Physical mobility of students and researchers towards the European Union, although an important source of learning and innovation, is not the only way through which cooperation can be increased. Other dimensions of collaboration should be considered and investigated taking advantage of new technologies, notably: *Distance education, E-Learning, Internationalisation of curricula through joint development and delivery of academic programmes leading to joint titles, Partnerships in research and teaching, including mutual use of infrastructure*.

The adoption of these alternative forms of collaboration, provided that the reciprocity principle is guaranteed, represents an enormous potential in the long term collaboration and in enhancing the relationships among universities of both regions.

- 4) Observing and understanding the attitudes, the opinions and the expectations of South East Asian Higher Education stakeholders towards the European Union is relevant³. However, it is necessary to also take into consideration the opposite perspective, the

³ See for instance ACA, 2005 “Perceptions of European Higher Education in Third Countries”

European towards the Asian⁴. Hence, a systematic monitoring process on the perceptions of the respective systems involving the actors of both regions should be ensured.

The ACCESS Project also aims at highlighting how horizontal international cooperation can work as an instrument to strengthen and promote the capacities of the organizations involved: intellectual, cultural, technological, scientific or humanistic as well as social ones. Cooperation is a learning process in itself provided that all participating parts get to know one another and can complement each other.

The use of the term *cooperation* combines elements of help and solidarity with those of marketing promotion and political and economic interests; it can be understood as well as the set of actions that allows the coordination of policies and joining forces to achieve common goals in the international arena. Thus, **cooperation** must be understood **as a two-way process** in which the countries involved agree to cooperate to solve a specific problem but also to achieve new common objectives and seize opportunities raised by the same interaction among institutions from both regions.

⁴ See for instance the work of the ESiA – European Studies in Asia, European Studies in Asia (ESiA), an action launched in 2005 by ASEF to stimulate European studies in the Asian region not only by strengthening interaction between existing networks in Asia, but also by creating synergies between European study centres in both Asia and Europe.

3. THE DIAGNOSIS

3.1 STATE OF THE ART EU-SEA RELATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The broad policy dialogue between Europe and South East Asia seems to be established on some major pillars such as economic cooperation and regional integration/cooperation. However, education and training have been increasingly given attention as both strategic to achieving social and economic development and to competing in a globalised world.

The main cooperation forum of EU-Asia dialogue in HE is the annual ASEM Ministerial Conference on higher education. The Asia-Europe Meetings were initially established in 1996 as an informal, multi-dimensional dialogue process between the 15 EU Member States, the European Commission and the 10 ASEAN states. Later they were enlarged as to include the nowadays 45 members⁵. The ASEM Ministerial Conferences on Higher Education started only in 2008 but upheld since the beginning a clear agenda of shaping a political framework for cooperation based on linking university with business/industry and pulling down obstacles to mobility. Strengthening cooperation in education and training was seen as central to promoting economic and social development in a globalised world as well as it is considered crucial to do so by involving stakeholders at all levels.

Already in 1997, though, ASEM had given life to ASEF, the Asia Europe Foundation, which aims at ensuring that cultural and educational issues are included in the wider framework of cooperation and dialogue between the two regions and that mutual understanding between the peoples of Asia and Europe is promoted through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. ASEF does so by playing the interface role between civil society groups and governments especially by organising conferences and workshops on subjects like education and academic cooperation, arts and culture, human rights and governance and so on. Later, in 1998, ASEF established the ASEM Education Hub, a multi-dimensional platform for cooperation and exchanges among higher education stakeholders, which produced and runs a number of support tools such as the DEEP (Databases of Education Exchange Programmes) database, targeting students and focused on study opportunities in the two regions.

A recent and very important development is the establishment in 2009, following an agreement by all ASEM Ministers responsible for Education, of a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) .. The AES will coordinate ASEM educational activities, help with preparations for the ASEM ministerial meetings, and facilitate the implementation of output-oriented initiatives that contribute to educational policy development and practices⁶.

Other attempts towards regional integration in the field of Higher Education and the start up of some sort of Bologna process in Asia are:

-  the Brisbane Initiative from Australia (launched in April 2006; Ministers from 27 countries across the Asia-Pacific region agreed to collaborate on key goals related to the quality of education and training in the region: <http://www.brisbanecommunique.deewr.gov.au>);

⁵ These include 43 countries, the European Commission and the ASEAN secretariat. Australia, New Zealand and Russia will officially join ASEM in the ASEM 8 Summit in October 2010, so that the number of the ASEM members will increase to 48.

⁶ Conclusions by the Chair, ASEM Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Hanoi, May 2009.

- ✦ the ASEAN+3 Summit (the process of regional integration of ten SEA States began in 1967; since 1997 it included China, Japan and the Rep. of Korea and broadened cooperation up to 20 areas covering security, crime, economics, energy, tourism, health, labour, culture and arts, environment etc. <http://www.aseansec.org/4918.htm>);
- ✦ a number of discussions in the frame of SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, established in 1965 as a chartered international organisation whose purpose is to promote cooperation in education, science and culture in the Southeast Asian region: <http://www.seameo.org>).

All mentioned initiatives are aligned on regarding issues such as **credits recognition and transferability, qualifications and quality assurance as key elements for reaching integration and promoting cooperation**. The last ASEM meeting of Higher Education Ministers, held in May 2009 in Hanoi, has agreed on the need to forge "*strategic partnerships for quality assurance, credit recognition and transfer in ASEM countries*"⁷ in order to strengthen cooperation in HE.

Consultation with SEA stakeholders (policy and decision makers, students, professors and researchers) has highlighted the need to tackle also the following key issues in order to contribute to an increased cooperation between the two regions:

- ✦ **mobility** of teachers and students as a bottom up contribution to building regional integration in HE (and beyond) through friendship-based collaboration, mutual respect and understanding;
- ✦ **lifelong learning**, as functional to sustainable human resources development and as a long term response to economic crises;
- ✦ **ICT** as central to any development, and e-learning resources as tools whose application in the SEA context is worth exploring and studying deeper and better;
- ✦ **participation/consultation** of all stakeholders as necessary to make any actions sustainable and the whole integration process well rooted.

⁷ See *Conclusions by the Chair of the 2nd ASEM Education Meeting*, held in Hanoi, Vietnam on May 14-15 2009 <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/Calendar/MinisterialMeetings/?id=249>

Main results from the ACCESS Survey

The ACCESS Survey, gathering opinions from 1347 students and 432 researchers from SEA and covering all 10 ASEAN countries, is providing important and significant inputs for discussion.

For SEA students, studying abroad is an opportunity both for a better career and for personal growth. Being exposed to a different cultural and learning environment, connecting to people from abroad, practicing a foreign language and getting a stimulating life experience are considered as valid reasons as accessing highly specialised knowledge, adding prestige to their curriculum vitae and securing more work opportunities.

However, studying abroad is not an indistinct concept for SEA students as they express clear preferences about destinations. Probably affected by the frame of the survey (a EU funded project) they expressed a major preference for Europe first, and USA then (Australia coming much lower). They consider or, rather, are well aware that Europe is expensive and this represents the major barrier to going abroad. Nevertheless, they seem quite confident that they could rely on different sources of sponsorship, mainly public, such as international agencies, governments and the academic institutions themselves, but also private ones such as family or bank loans, or patronage from employers.

Beside conventional physical mobility, joint degrees and curricula are considered a good way to access the foreign educational world together to enrolling in local branches of foreign universities and the virtual mobility. Distance education as such, instead, is quite disregarded as an unattractive modality. This seems to imply that they are aware of new ways of studying and participating in cross-borders programmes and that they rely also on e-learning modalities. This, in turn, means that they are confident that they can access ICT such as computers, internet and relevant software.

Europe in general, though not a perfect neither homogeneous entity, is seen as a point of reference which, possibly even because of its complex cultural and social nature, can provide some lessons for SEA students to bring back home.




Also SEA researchers showed a perception of Europe as an attraction pole but too expensive to access at the moment. They appear to be quite aware of the differences of systems still existing within Europe notwithstanding the ongoing efforts to pursue the Bologna process but still consider it as a model to look at for improving domestic systems and gradually proceed towards harmonisation. Most researchers do consider undertaking research with foreign universities. They are aware of existing research agreements between their university and foreign ones and look at them with favour so indicating a way of action.

According to them, both joint curricula and research programmes would affect highly positively their national HE systems under the only condition that equity of collaboration among different states is respected. This show an open and positive attitude to cooperate with foreign university and researchers, which lays the basis for an effort to intensify academic cooperation. Besides, given that most of them speak a European language (though, actually, mostly English) and have access to internet, they are ready to join international research programmes and teams, and experiment new modes of participation such as virtual mobility and e-learning.




3.2 KEY CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

In the frame of the current context of cooperation between the two regions, consultation with experts, policy and decisions makers in the field highlighted the following challenges, which shall be taken into consideration when designing strategies to enhance cooperation:

At the policy level:

-  the apparent absence of Higher Education as a priority in the current policy dialogue among the European Union and South East Asia;
-  the fragmentation of the region in terms of Higher Education systems, infrastructural development, culture and language;
-  the openness and mobility constraints given – in some countries – by national governments.

At the practice level:

-  the presence of mainly “bilateral initiatives” (offshore campuses, education fairs, liaison offices) among some Anglophone countries (USA, UK and Australia), and SEA partners;
-  the presence of few European “stable initiatives” other than British, in the area (except INSEAD Campus, a recently German established campus in Vietnam and few others);
-  the fact that some countries of the South East Asian region (such as Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia) are more open towards Higher Education international collaboration .

Based on the diagnosis presented above and on the identified key challenges, the next section provides the ACCSS proposals for action, to be discussed with all relevant stakeholders through on line consultation and in the frame of the ACCESS Events⁸ of 2010.

⁸ 1st Event “Students involvement in university management” 2-3 February; 2nd Event “Physical and virtual mobility as an instrument for integration”, Manila, Philippines, 5-6-7 May; 3rd Event “Challenges for South East Asia-Europe university cooperation in the 21st Century” Indonesia, end of July. For further and updated information see <http://www.access-project.eu>.

4. PROPOSAL

4.1 PRE-CONDITIONS TO OPENING UP TOWARDS COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

Some conditions must be in place in order for the cooperation process to go on smoothly and effectively; these conditions should be monitored and action should be taken in case they are no more met.

Political support

The existing level of official recognition and institutionalisation must be kept high both to make the process more credible, effective and continuing and to help pull down barriers that hamper mobility and cooperation such as visas, mutual recognition of studies etc. In this perspective, for instance, the involvement and activation of Rectors' conferences or associations is encouraged provided that the information flow reaches the lower (till grassroots) levels too and all stakeholders are involved.

Similarly, if the process manages to be perceived as "owned" by the concerned stakeholders, it will more easily lead to Memorandum of understandings or other agreements with Governments to smoothen bureaucratic barriers (not only with reference to visa and stay permit issues but also getting academic and non academic staff involved trained so to facilitate the whole process of cooperation and implementation of exchange programmes).

Collaboration

A collaborative approach would be crucial to foster cooperation between the two regions since it implies reciprocal knowledge, exchange of information, equity among participants, involvement of grassroots level stakeholders, joint academic initiatives such as programmes for physical mobility of students and teachers, joint degrees, and discussion fora such as meetings and conferences.

Governance and students' role

Students are at the same time a resource for higher education, the main beneficiaries of higher education and the future leaders of society. Their involvement in the decision making processes conditioning the evolution of higher education is therefore key.. Students could and should be considered integral part of the cooperation framework between EU and SEA that is still to be outlined. To make their integration in governance effective, students should be, made responsible so to feel the ownership of the process and firmly commit to it. In this context, cooperation between students' associations of Europe and South East Asia should be fostered to share experiences and best practices in the field of students' contribution to governance.

Knowledge Exchange

The European Higher Education system, especially in terms of lifelong learning and quality framework, can be a point of (HE) reference and a model to look at while striving for SEA regional integration. However, the process must guarantee a certain equity in participation among the participating countries and some necessary adaptations to the local, regional context. Beside, HE and research should be tackled in a synergetic way and joint actions should be encouraged. As a consequence, cooperation should be intensified to avoid

duplication and reach for a stronger policy coherence, especially with reference to EU funding.

4.2 PROPOSED ACTIONS

Given the scenario described above, ACCESS proposes to focus attention and energies into the following broad policy aims:

1. **create mechanisms to reduce the fragmentation and overlapping** of existing cooperation mechanisms between the two regions;
2. **investigate on the interest and feasibility for the creation of a common Higher Education Area between EU and SEA (to be further expanded to Asia)** implying systematic cooperation in terms of mobility, curricula development and research.

Within these broad policy aims ACCESS believes the following targeted actions shall be promoted:

1. **shifting from a Government to Government to a Government to People and People to People perspective** : Enhance dialogue and involvement of stakeholders in the discussion and reflections on the feasibility and value added that a Common Higher Education Area between Europe and South East Asia could bring in terms of regional and interregional integration, also in view of the ASEAN objectives for 2015.
2. **promoting information and knowledge as well as best practice sharing** between the two regions in terms of: innovative university governance; regional integration of higher education systems; exploitation of ICT as a mean to support integration through virtual mobility; university-industry cooperation as a lever for local development and innovation, etc.
3. **reinforcing existing cooperation platforms** for securing (almost) exhaustive flow and exchange of information on HE initiatives between the two regions, including the DEEP database for students which is already working and proved useful;
4. **increasing physical and virtual mobility** between the two regions in order to contribute to building cooperation from the bottom through better mutual knowledge, cultural links, linguistic skills. Testing of virtual mobility models should be promoted to compensate for insufficient funds face to request/desire of mobility.
5. **conducting awareness raising campaigns within EU and SEA Higher Education institutions, including academic as well as non academic staff and students** so to motivate them towards the final goals and make them more collaborative and participative.

5. NEXT STEPS

With the present Green Paper, The ACCESS project wants to contribute, in full cooperation with the initiatives described above, to a convergence process that should involve institutional actors and the most consolidated networks active in this field, and advocate that synergy can be created and a “federative” effort may bring academic cooperation much beyond the limited horizon of a closed coordination process among a few government representatives. Young researchers and students might lead EU-SEA Higher Education systems there anyhow, in a spontaneous process of mutual discovery, so **why not to structure the whole process in an open way?**

The present paper is **proposed for discussion and consensus building** to all those interested in the achievement of the EU-SEA Common Space of Higher Education.





This Green Paper will be discussed with stakeholders and policy makers of Europe and South East Asia throughout 2010 and feed the ACCESS White Paper, containing recommendations to enhance cooperation in Higher Education between the two regions.

If you wish to contribute to the discussion please contact Ms Cristina Brecciaroli at cbrecciaroli@scienter.org.

ANNEX: THE ACCESS PROJECT

The ACCESS project (Academic Cooperation Europe-South-East Asia Support) aims at strengthening cooperation between higher education institutions from Europe and South East Asia (SEA) in a long-term and sustainable perspective. The project, supported by the Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Commission, explores the perceptions and expectations of SEA higher education stakeholders towards European higher education system, promotes meaningful higher education partnership schemes and supports dialogue around the possible construction of a common EU-SEA HE area.

The project consists of four components:

-  the SURVEY component, aiming to understand opinions, attitudes and expectations of SEA HE stakeholders towards European HE;
-  the POLICY DIALOGUE component, aiming to contribute to the policy debate on the improvement of EU-SEA Higher Education cooperation;
-  the PROMOTION component, aiming to promote the attractiveness of European HE through the development of new partnership value proposition to SEA HE institutions (in line with the Erasmus Mundus approach);
-  SERVICES component, aiming to set-up and validate a network-based service model to support EU-SEA HE cooperation and mobility.

The founding idea of the project is to reach its objectives by “promoting, through partnership and mutual benefit, value proposition” which implies facilitating and supporting mutual knowledge and information sharing in a collaboration perspective, through partnership building.

For more information on the ACCESS project visit our web site <http://www.access-project.eu/> or contact the project coordinator, Mr Fabio Nascimbeni fabio.nascimbeni@menon.org