CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Feasibility Study and Policy Brief on
Credit Recognition and Transfer Systems in Asia-Pacific

Terms of Reference

Type of Contract: Contract for Services

Duration of contract: 1 March -30 June 2019

Closing date: 15 February 2019

Background

In the year 2015, the international community adopted an ambitious and aspirational global education agenda known as Education 2030 or Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4). In SDG4, higher education was given a prominent role, including SDG Target 4.3: "By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university". In order to achieve this target, a key strategy is to promote internationalization of higher education through cross-border mobility programmes, institutional capacity building and quality-based qualification recognition to support increased access, and better quality higher education.

Given Asia-Pacific is the fastest-growing region in terms of the numbers of inbound and outbound international students, strengthening credit recognition and transfer systems is timely and increasingly important. Currently, the differences between national systems are significant and limit recognition of educational qualifications from other countries and of periods of study taken abroad or through non-traditional modes of learning such as open and distance learning. Assessing the feasibility of a **credit recognition and transfer system for valuing, measuring, describing and comparing educational achievement in Asia-Pacific** is an ongoing challenge. The aim is for credit transfer systems to help facilitate mobility as well as promote the recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning across diverse modes of learning. The following section elaborates on efforts in Asia-Pacific and beyond.

Developing Regional Quality Tools

In Europe, the European Commission has successfully introduced the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Similar efforts are underway including SEAMEO RIHED's Common Credit Transfer System for Great Mekong Subregion (GMS) and the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS), which provides a credit transfer mechanism for student exchange programmes among 26 ASEAN University Network (AUN) member universities.[1] See the ANNEX for an overview of credit transfer systems.

Launched in 2015 with generous support from the **Republic of Korea Funds-in-Trust (KFIT)**, the KFIT Higher Education Project helps to develop regional quality tools in Asia-Pacific to facilitate the recognition of foreign higher education credits, study programmes and qualifications, and contribute to the enhancement of cross-border mobility of students among countries in the region. The project has conducted several stocktaking exercises related to the development of quality tools such as the Regional Guidelines on Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)[2], and the forthcoming Regional Guidelines on National Subject-Specific Quality Standards and on programme level specifications. Building on these initiatives, the next section elaborates on the purpose and objectives of the feasibility study on the *Asia-Pacific Regional Credit Recognition and Transfer System* and resulting policy brief.

Objectives of the Policy Brief

The policy brief will assess the feasibility of a credit recognition and transfer system in Asia-Pacific. In line with SDG4 and the recent **Seoul Statement**[3] on recognition in October 2018, the purpose of the feasibility study is to collect experiences and review existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms for the Asia-Pacific credit recognition and transfer system. Building on the Education 2030 Framework for Action, a related objective of the feasibility study is to:

> "Ensure quality assurance, comparability and recognition of tertiary education qualifications and facilitate credit transfers between recognized tertiary education institutions" (Education 2030 Framework for Action, paragraph 45).

Further, the provision of flexible learning pathways, as well as the **recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education** are increasingly important means to ensure equitable access to quality higher education. To promote the accessibility and comparability of lifelong learning systems in Asia-Pacific, credit recognition and transfer systems must also be interconnected. In this way, the feasibility study is a means to share experiences through comparing and recognizing learning across countries and modes of delivery in the Asia-Pacific region.

Regional efforts can synergize existing mobility programmes, credit recognition and regional qualification frameworks so that qualifications are better recognized and portable across borders.

---

[1] SHARE Project Management Office, Feb 2016. Student Mobility and Credit Transfer System in ASEAN Mapping student mobility and Credit Transfer Systems in ASEAN region.
[2] UNESCO Bangkok, 2018. Guidelines on Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia and the Pacific - Building a Culture of Shared Responsibility.

The guiding principles for fair recognition practices is the *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education* **(Tokyo Convention),** which entered into force on 1 February 2018 after ratification by five UNESCO Member States.

The Tokyo Convention on recognition provides renewed opportunities for countries to harmonize their recognition policies and practices for greater cross-border mobility of students. All Member States are eligible to ratify and implement the Tokyo Convention. In this way, mobility programmes in the region can be strengthened and extended to promote collaboration to achieve SDG4.[3]

The policy brief will assess the links and existing quality tools to support the design and delivery of programmes across formal, non-formal and informal modes that may lead to the award of mutually recognized pathways to higher education qualifications. Together with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, such systems can strengthen educational programme development and make qualifications understandable for all.

Research Approach

Under the direct supervision of the Chief of Section for Educational Innovation and Skills Development, the contractor will develop a formal report (30-40 pages) and an executive summary as a policy brief (4 pages) on *Credit Recognition and Transfer Systems in Asia and the Pacific*. The approach involves desk research, interviews and hosting an expert meeting in Seoul, Republic of Korea or other proposed location.

The main components of the research approach include:

A. *Consultations on credit recognition systems to achieve SDG4*
   - Host consultation meeting (est. 8-10 peer reviewers) to review the status of credit transfer systems in Asia-Pacific and peer review the draft report
   - Develop actionable insights and recommendations to promote the comparability and portability of credits in Asia-Pacific and inform the final policy brief

B. *Prepare a full report on credit recognition and transfer systems in Asia-Pacific*
   - Assess definitions for credits in lifelong learning systems and terminology[4] (e.g. 8-10 country profiles on credit transfer systems and their alignment)
   - Link qualifications recognition with quality assurance and qualifications frameworks to promote international mobility and lifelong learning
   - Review effective practices for recognition of non-formal and informal learning
   - Highlight key challenges and opportunities for the Tokyo Convention Committee

C. *Policy Brief Outline: Credit transfer in lifelong learning systems in Asia-Pacific*

---

[3] UNESCO Bangkok, 18-19 October 2018. Seoul Statement. The Tokyo Convention – A new era for mobility and internationalisation of higher education in the Asia-Pacific through qualifications recognition.
[4] For example, compared to definitions in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011)

- Towards Agenda 2030: Mobility as a means to achieve SDG4
- Linking qualifications recognition with QA and qualifications frameworks
- Measuring learning outcomes: Current practices for credit recognition and transfer
- Building consensus: Key principles for credits in lifelong learning systems
- Way forward: Actionable recommendations for stakeholders in Asia-Pacific

Schedule and Deliverables

The Contractor shall complete the following work assignment by the indicated tentative timeline for UNESCO's review and approval:

Activity / Deliverable	Timeline
Contractual arrangements completed	28 February 2019
Consultation meeting with UNESCO staff (virtual or in Bangkok)	Early March
Draft report on credit transfer systems in Asia-Pacific	Early May
Host stakeholder's meeting for peer review	End of May
Submit final report and policy brief	End of June

All work shall be completed by 28 June 2019 at the latest. In line with UNESCO's overall gender mainstreaming strategy, the contractor is expected to integrate a gender perspective and apply gender analysis and mainstreaming concepts whenever feasible.

Qualifications

The project lead should possess the following mandatory qualifications and experience:

- University degree at Ph.D., or masters level or equivalent in Education, Social Sciences, Political Sciences, or a related field;
- At least ten years of working experience acquired at the international level or in an international setting;
- Understanding and knowledge of UNESCO's mandate and its programming in relation to higher education;
- Excellent analytical and drafting skills in English;
- Experience with assignments focusing on multi stakeholder partnerships, and/or higher education capacity building in Asia and the Pacific.

Verification of these qualifications will be based on the provided curriculum vitae.

How to submit a proposal

An offer comprising of:
1. A technical proposal, which should include a cover letter describing relevant professional experience and suggestions for the proposed report and policy brief;
2. A financial proposal. Financial estimates should include costs for travel and hosting a meeting for 8-10 international guests to Seoul, Republic of Korea or other proposed location.

The technical proposal and financial proposal should be attached in an email to UNESCO Bangkok in two separate files and sent to the following email address no later than **15 February 2019**: eisd.bgk@unesco.org.

For any requests for clarification, please contact Mr. Wesley Teter (wr.teter@unesco.org).

Annex - Comparison of systems within ASEAN and with Europe (excerpt)

Year of implementation	Adopted by UMAP International Board in 2012 - introduced 2013 - Not yet on UMAPs webpage (as of 30.09.15)	2000	2011	1989; ECTS Users' Guide has been revised and new version adopted in 2015
Countries involved	UCTS participating countries	23 Countries: Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, People's Republic of China, Ecuador, Fiji, Guam, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Laos, Macao, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Samoa, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, USA, Vietnam	ASEAN + partners: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, France (through Campus France), Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.	49 countries in European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom
Types of HEIs	UCTS participating HEIs	All public or private HEIs located in UMAP Member Countries/Territories, and recognized in the participating home Country/Territory	33 AUN member and nonmember Universities (Firsttier / Leading HEIs)	All HEIs in EHEA
Level of Studies	Graduate and Undergraduate	Graduate and Undergraduate	Graduate, Undergraduate, and short course programs	Graduate and Undergraduate, lifelong learning (i.e. work placements)
Type of Credit Transfer	Non-conversion principle	Conversion principle: old UCTS uses the total number of credits required to complete each degree (e.g.: a 4 year program with a total of 120 credits = 31 credits p/year. Old UCTS = 60 credits p/year, hence conversion would	Non-conversion principle	Non-conversion principle

		be 60/31 = 1.93; that is 1 credit=1.93 UCTS		
Credit definition	1 Academic year = 30 to 35 credits	1 academic year = 60 credits	1 academic year = 60 credits	1 academic year= 60 credits
Student Workload per year	1800 to 2100 hours	1800 hours		1500–1800 hours
Student Workload per credit	38-48 hours (includes 13- 16 academic hours of instruction)	30 hours of work	25-30 hours of student workload	25 to 30 hours of work.
Teaching hours	13-16	---	Not applicable	Not applicable
Grading Scale	Dual system where students receive two scores: one based on the host university's regulation and the other based on a common credit system	UCTS Grading Scale used as a conversion scale adopted the grading scale used by ECTS (old) consisting of grades from A to F, with E being the lowest passing grade. Application of the grading scale is not a mandatory element of UCTS	ACTS grading scale will be based on the achievement ranking of a student in a given assessment. Students will be divided into 5: from A (Excellent) to E/F (Fail).	Grade distribution table developed in a standardised format (statistical distribution table of the passing grades awarded in the programme showing how the grading scale is actually used in that programme) in addition to their national/institutional grading scale and an explanation of the scale. The grade distribution table was first introduced in the ECTS Users' Guide in 2009, as a replacement for the previous ECTS grading scales (A, B, C, D, E), which are not used anymore.
Supporting documents	University brochure and homepage for student exchanges to explain the concept of this new UCTS, UMAP Standard Application Form and Study Plan.	UMAP information package, UMAP Study Plan, UMAP Transcript	ACTS Student Application Form, ACTS Learning Agreement, ACTS Transcript of Records for Exchange Semester/s, Academic Record as a copy of official transcript in English, and ACTS Certificate.	Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Traineeship Certificate, Diploma Supplement.