

# Revised ASEAN Plus Three Guidelines on Student Exchange and Mobility: THE NEW NORMAL EXCHANGES & MOBILITY

## 1. VISION

The ASEAN Plus Three countries aspire to achieve mutual understanding, peace and development in the region through greater promotion of student exchanges and balanced mobility for future generations .

## 2. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

In 2015, ASEAN Plus Three Guidelines on Student Exchanges were introduced at the ASEAN Plus Three Ministerial Meeting to provide a basic framework for student exchanges and mobility that guarantees quality assurance and equity, and to promote the development of higher education in each of the ASEAN Plus Three countries.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant changes to the higher education landscape around the world, pushing many higher education institutions to promote the use of new modalities for international education and student mobility without necessitating overseas travel, whereby teaching and learning take place remotely and on digital platforms. While the new modes of student exchange and mobility offer some benefits and opportunities, they also pose a new set of issues and challenges that we have never experienced before. For example, one notable challenge in the online learning system that must be resolved is the issue of equality. Although digitization in the education sector has been around for a long time, students still do not have equal access to devices, applications, or internet connections. The growing need for distance learning has actually widened the gap in the online learning process. Even in a hybrid learning model, each student deserves an equal education. This is related not only to issues of comfort but also accessibility. Therefore, the “Revised Guidelines” (hereafter “the Guidelines”) are intended as a complement to the 2016 Guidelines and not as a replacement.

While a certain number of higher education institutions in the ASEAN Plus Three region have transitioned to online education, many institutions in the region may have difficulty moving to an online learning medium because of their different levels of preparedness for online education and digital technologies. The ASEAN PLUS Countries shall also take into account these specific aspects (e.g., digital gaps, infrastructure, digital capacity building) in preparing the Guidelines.

The Guidelines serve as a reference point for relevant programmes in the ASEAN Plus Three countries (hereafter “programmes”) to **promote student exchanges and the continuity of student mobility**, whether they be traditional<sup>1</sup> or online programmes (including ‘hybrid’ programmes combining both online and on-site programmes, hereafter “hybrid programmes”).

Each country is encouraged to explore possible means of support to promote the

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional student exchange programmes refer to those on-site programmes that take place offline, requiring participants to travel to an institution. The term is used interchangeably with face-to-face or offline programmes in the guidelines.

utilization of the Guidelines for the programmes.

### **3. PARTICIPATION**

Each country makes the Guidelines known to the universities and other related institutions in the country.

When an ASEAN Plus Three country participates in the student exchanges framework under the Guidelines, a “focal point” within the government and/or other entity designated by the government should be appointed in each country.

When a university or other higher education institution participates in the student exchanges framework under the Guidelines, the focal point should endorse the institution. Both the government (and/or other entity designated by the government) and the participating institutions in the country are encouraged to comply with all the terms of the Guidelines.

## **4. STUDENT EXCHANGES AND MOBILITY**

### **4.1 TRADITIONAL STUDENT EXCHANGES AND MOBILITY**

The following items should be taken into consideration when making and managing programmes in the ASEAN Plus Three countries.

#### **4.1.1. LENGTH OF STUDY AND PROGRAMME TYPES**

The length of student exchange programme types under the Guidelines are classified into the following categories:

##### **A. Length of Study**

The length of programmes varies, but the following time frames are a general rule of thumb.

- (a) Less than three months
- (b) Three months to less than six months
- (c) Six months to twelve months
- (d) More than twelve months

##### **B. Types of Programmes**

- (a) Degree awarding
- (b) Credit awarding
- (c) Others (e.g., co-curricular activities, *modular courses*, and *micro-credential programmes*)

#### **4.1.2. STUDENT LEVEL**

Graduate or undergraduate levels, *which may include but are not limited to classroom learning, laboratory work, practicums, fieldwork and other mutually agreed activities*

#### **4.1.3. LANGUAGES**

The preferred medium of instruction is English, but other languages are not excluded.

#### **4.1.4. ACADEMIC FIELDS**

The academic fields should be decided by the partner institutions in accordance with their willingness to participate and in consideration of their respective situations and agreements. The scope of available fields of study is not limited, but for the sake of

convenience, is classified into the following categories:

- (a) Education
- (b) Humanities and arts
- (c) Health and welfare
- (d) Social sciences, business and law
- (e) Service
- (f) Engineering, manufacturing and construction
- (g) Life sciences
- (h) Physical sciences
- (i) Mathematics and statistics
- (j) Computing
- (k) Agriculture
- (l) Others

#### **4.1.5. SELECTION OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS**

The criteria for the selection of the students must be worked out and agreed upon between the home and host universities and refer to ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) if applicable. Balanced mobility is ideal, but the flexible and equitable nature of mobility should also be considered.

## **4.2. NEW MODES OF STUDENT EXCHANGES AND MOBILITY**

Items in Section 4.1 (Traditional Student Exchanges and Mobility) shall also be valid for New Modes of Student Exchanges And Mobility. However, the following items should be additionally taken into consideration when making and managing New Modes of Student Exchanges and Mobility programmes in the ASEAN Plus Three countries.

### **4.2.1. Approaches to Online Exchanges and Delivery Methods**

Given the number of learning environments and approaches, the following subsection is mainly focused on academic course offerings.

#### **A. Unit of Online Exchanges**

- (a) Single academic course
- (b) Multiple academic courses
- (c) Others (e.g., virtual co-curricular activities)

#### **B. Delivery Methods**

- (a) Online only
- (b) Hybrid (online and on-site combined)

#### **C. Modes of Online Delivery**

- (a) Asynchronous mode (e.g., prerecorded videos lessons, online discussion boards, etc.)
- (b) Synchronous mode (e.g., online streaming courses delivered via ZOOM, WebEx, etc.)
- (c) Combined mode

#### **4.2.2. ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT**

In case of new modes of student exchanges and mobility where a number of member higher education institutions are involved online, a central coordination body should be designated by member countries and/or universities to centrally manage and coordinate the set-up, ongoing administration, and technical support of a student exchange platform

Universities offering courses will use their own online platforms to run the courses. It is noted, however, that some course platforms may not be accessible in some countries or regions.

In terms of university alliances, member universities may contribute, on a voluntary basis, to courses offered online (including 'hybrid'), which are either credit-bearing (academic) or non-credit bearing (co-curricular) as a 'course repository' to be open to students from participating universities and their own students.

A membership fee may be charged, if necessary, to cover platform and network management costs (e.g., the set-up, ongoing administration, and technical support of a student exchange platform, etc.) based on the agreement of member countries and/or universities.

Promotion and sign-up of the program (and the individual courses) need to take place from a platform that is to be centrally managed.

Time zones should be taken into account for participating universities that will provide courses in a synchronous manner.

#### **4.2.3. SELECTION OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS**

Although host universities will have the final say in which students to accept, there should be a general agreement on how students will be selected. Universities offering online courses for international students will administer and manage course registration in case of over-enrollment. Decisions will be made between participating institutions, but balanced mobility may be considered.

#### **4.2.4. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND PRIVACY PROTECTION**

Participating universities need to ensure intellectual property rights in online instructional and digital materials, creative common licenses<sup>2</sup>, as well as student privacy are protected before students can be accepted.

### **5. CREDITS AND CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM**

In accordance with the agreements between the member countries and universities, the home university is encouraged to develop a system for accepting the transfer of credits in conformity with internationally recognized credit transfer systems such as the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) Credit Transfer System (UCTS) and ASEAN Credit Transfer Systems (ACTS) and European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Home institutions are encouraged to recognize earned credits and degrees, either through traditional on-site or online programmes, from host institutions. Participating universities need to work out how to manage credit transfers and other administrative issues through their internal systems.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://iite.unesco.org/pics/publications/en/files/3214680.pdf>

Implementation of the credit transfer system among universities should be handled through a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding

## **6. QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **6.1. GOVERNMENT**

Under the policy framework of the participating country, each respective government promotes student mobility with quality assurance and encourages its quality assurance bodies to communicate and collaborate with relevant bodies across the ASEAN Plus Three countries.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many higher education institutions around the world to accelerate expansion of online education and blend in-person and online learning, the issue of quality assurance becomes even more important for higher education institutions. Therefore, each government and/or affiliated organisation (defined in Article 3 as a 'focal point') is encouraged to develop guidelines for the operation and management of online-based student exchange programmes at the institutional level. Such online-based international student exchanges and mobility guidelines in each participating country *may* include the following elements:

- (a) Standards regulating which courses are defined as online courses
- (b) Proportion of online courses among total course offerings
- (c) Regulations on course attendance in online courses
- (d) Regulations on offering online courses depending upon the nature of courses offered (e.g., lab-based courses, practicum courses)
- (e) Existence of limits on the maximum number of courses that can be taken online to satisfy the minimum required credits for graduation
- (g) Regulations on how online courses are evaluated (e.g., measures to prevent plagiarism and academic dishonesty in online tests/evaluations)
- (h) Standards on facilities/equipment individual institutions need to provide for online courses
- (i) Institutional level measures and mechanisms to ensure the quality of online education such as learning design, opportunities for students to participate in discussion and collaboration, instructor feedback, monitoring and tracking student progress, and level of student engagement

### **6.2. UNIVERSITY/ PROGRAMMES OF STUDY**

Universities and/or programs of study for student exchanges are encouraged to be officially accredited and evaluated by related accreditation bodies and evaluation agencies.

With the increasingly widespread adoption of online education, it is recommended that individual universities put measures and mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of online education at their respective institutions.

## **7. FINANCIAL COSTS AND OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES**

Financial and other forms of support are considered across stakeholders, government, universities and other related institutions, under the following principles.

### **7.1. FINANCE**

Financial support for participating students, which includes but is not limited to the items below, should be considered based on the type of student exchange programmes (e.g., government sponsored vs. institutional-level voluntary student exchange

programmes; on-site vs. online - including hybrid - student exchange programmes), and the capacity and context of the stakeholders.

Governments should encourage universities and relevant institutions to provide the following support in accordance with the policies of the country:

**Home country (government, universities and other related institutions):**

- Subsidize travel expenses to the host country
- Provide international health insurance
- Allot a monthly allowance to students
- Cover costs for transportation, meals, accommodations, etc. during the *required* quarantine period after entering the host country
- Visa fees and other administrative services as necessary
- Provide scholarships and/ or research grants

Host universities are encouraged to waive tuition fees for online student exchange programmes (e.g., either academic course(s) or co-curricular activities). Tuition fees for such programmes will be collected by the home institution.

## **7.2. STUDENT SUPPORT**

Student support, which includes but is not limited to the items below, should be considered based on the capacity and context of the stakeholders. Governments should encourage universities and relevant institutions to provide the following forms of support in accordance with the policies of the country:

**Home country (government, universities and other related institutions):**

- Provide information on scholarships and/ or research grants
- Provide information on the home country's status in relation to of infectious diseases, *disaster risk* and intervention policy
- Provide an orientation programme for students before departure

**Host country (government, universities and other related institutions):**

- Post necessary information on topics such as programmes of study, enrollment requirements and registration procedures, and an academic calendar in English via a website
- Provide information on the host country's status in relation to infectious diseases, *disaster risk* and intervention policy
- Develop an international student handbook
- Support to obtain the relevant visa
- Arrange pick up on arrival and departure
- Provide an orientation programme for students upon arrival
- Provide technical support to take online courses
- Support to find accommodation
- Provide basic medical care as well as mental health counseling and resources, as well as psychological consultations, if needed
- Universities should designate a person to assist an international student in case of an emergency.
- Provide accommodation and essentials, including food, in quarantine
- Establish a "buddy" / tutoring and international advisor system for international students

## **8. MONITORING AND INFORMATION SHARING**

**THE** Working Group on Student Mobility and Quality Assurance of Higher Education among ASEAN Plus Three Countries (APTWG) meets annually and reports its progress to ASEAN Plus Three Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED+3)

Each country is encouraged to monitor programmes in their respective country, and collect relevant information, including statistical data, good practices and student reports to be shared at the APTWG meeting and subsequently may be reported by APTWG to SOM-ED+3.

The above-mentioned information is also reported, in accordance with the regulations of each country through websites such as the National Information Center, which is supposed to be established in each country based on the articles in the UNESCO "Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education", and/or other websites designated by the governments.

While the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance and relevance of online education in international student exchange programmes and practices through technological advancement, there will be a fair amount of trial and error involved in the initial implementation process. To maximize the positive impact and mitigate the negative impact of online-based international student exchanges, a systematic mechanism should be established to monitor and share information on best practices in student exchange programmes and services.

## **9. NEW MODES OF STUDENT EXCHANGES/MOBILITY AND EQUITY**

Given that the level and utilization of information and communication technology (hereafter "ICT") infrastructure vary by country in the ASEAN Plus Three region, students from certain countries in the region may have limited opportunities to participate in international exchange activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital gaps such as Internet access and technology tools for online learning (e.g., computers, tablets, etc.) have further widened and the importance of digital literacy has increased, playing a crucial role in students' academic achievement. As technology-enabled forms of online-based student exchanges have been growing in recognition and acceptance, international organizations and governments in the ASEAN Plus Three region should work with higher education institutions, the private sector and other related stakeholders to actively provide support for countries and universities that lack ICT infrastructure to engage in new online-based modalities of international student exchange.

With the impact of digital inequality on the higher education environment in mind, the following suggestions need to be considered:

- Provide adequate resources and ongoing professional development and training opportunities for faculty to acquire the necessary skills for developing and delivering online courses and improve the quality of online instruction
- Provide mental health services and resources to help students cope with the mental health challenges such as stress and anxiety caused by the uncertain trajectory of the pandemic and long-term social distancing and isolation
- Provide resources and technical support to strengthen students' ability to use technology effectively in the context of online learning

It is crucial for every university to enable students to develop digital competencies according to their learning needs and future plans. In this regard, educational institutions have a significant responsibility to foster digital literacy so that students

can access and use a variety of online services. Based on current conditions, each government needs to conduct an in-depth study to adjust the educational curriculum to ensure continuity and flexibility without compromising the quality of the education itself. Education is a national asset. A country's progress depends on the quality of its existing human resources. If a country's education system is characterized by exceptional quality, it will have the assets to support the life of the nation in the future. This is also reflected in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

#### **10. ASEAN PLUS THREE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AGENDA**

The following key issues can be further explored through collaborative research efforts organized by the APT countries to discover benefits and limitations of new modes of student exchanges:

- Outcomes of two different modes of student exchange programmes (traditional face-to-face vs. online (including hybrid) student exchange programmes
- Impact of new modes of student exchanges and mobility on educational equity (in particular for those student groups who live in countries and regions with weaker ICT infrastructures) and;
- Ways of enhancing the quality of non-traditional student exchanges and mobility programmes.

#### **REMARKS**

In addition to online student exchanges, each country is encouraged to promote further international exchanges among researchers, faculty members and staff .

## Appendix

### DEFINITIONS AND SELECTION OF KEY TERMS IN THE GUIDELINES

Unlike traditional offline student exchanges and mobility programmes, more and more students have been participating in student exchange programmes through non-face-to-face methods since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In these new student exchange programmes, the method of taking both regular classes and co-curricular activities without travelling abroad is referred to by various terms such as "online education", "distance education", "virtual education", "hybrid education", and "blended education", etc. A description of each term is provided below.

#### A. **Online vs. Distance, vs. Virtual Education cf. Offline Education**

**"Online Education"** is a flexible instructional delivery system that encompasses any kind of learning that takes place via the Internet.<sup>3</sup>

**"Distance Education"**, also called as distance learning, e-learning, and online learning, refers to a form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication<sup>4</sup>

**"Virtual Education"** refers to instruction in a learning environment where teacher and student are separated by time or space, or both, and the teacher provides course content through course management applications, multimedia resources, the Internet, video conferencing, etc. Students receive the content and communicate with the teacher via the same technologies<sup>5</sup>.

**"On-site education"** is a traditional learning system where students and teachers engage in face-to-face learning.<sup>6</sup>

#### B. **Hybrid Education (Learning) vs. Blended Education (Learning)**

**"Hybrid education/learning"** is an educational approach where some individuals participate in person and some participate online. Instructors and facilitators teach remote and in-person learners concurrently while simultaneously using technology like video conferencing.

**"Blended education/learning"** is an educational approach where instructors and facilitators combine in-person instruction with online learning activities and materials. Learners complete some components online and do others in person.<sup>7</sup>

These two terms appear to have been used interchangeably, causing some confusion. Although both types of learning involve a mix of in-person and online learning, these two approaches are different in that in the **hybrid learning model**, the in-person learners and online learners constitute different individuals whereas in the **blended learning model**, the same individuals learn both in person and online.<sup>8</sup>

However, in a different source, hybrid learning (education) and blended learning (education) are not distinctively differentiated. For example, "blended learning", also known

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<sup>3</sup> Source: [www.encyclopedia.com/finance/finance-and-accounting-magazines/online-education](http://www.encyclopedia.com/finance/finance-and-accounting-magazines/online-education)

<sup>4</sup> Source: [www.britannica.com/topic/distance-learning](http://www.britannica.com/topic/distance-learning)

<sup>5</sup> Source: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/bridging-the-gap-with-distance-education-students/103609](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/bridging-the-gap-with-distance-education-students/103609)

<sup>6</sup> Source: [www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/social-issues/online-vs-offline-education-advantages-and-disadvantages](http://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/social-issues/online-vs-offline-education-advantages-and-disadvantages)

<sup>7</sup> Source: <https://www.leadinglearning.com/hybrid-vs-blended-learning/>

<sup>8</sup> Source: <https://www.leadinglearning.com/hybrid-vs-blended-learning/>

*as “hybrid learning”, is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional location-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of student control over time, place, path, or pace. While students still attend “brick-and-mortar” schools with a teacher present, face-to-face classroom practices are combined with computer-mediated activities regarding content and delivery<sup>9</sup>.*

Of the above-mentioned terms, “online education” refers to a new mode of education based on the internet and digital technology and “hybrid education” refers to an online/on-site-combined education modality. The reason is as follows:

1. We (the Korean draft team) acknowledge that there may be other types of non-face-to-face education other than education and learning activities delivered primarily via the Internet. However, as non-face-to-face student exchange programmes will be launched for the first time in the region, it would be strategically relevant to limit the scope of the guidelines to ensure they are as simple as possible.

2. Considering that the definitions of terms of hybrid education and blended education vary, but there are few commonly accepted distinctions between the two terms, these terms will not be distinguished to minimize confusion. Accordingly, hybrid education refers to a program in which online and face-to-face education are combined and is used interchangeably with blended education in the guidelines.

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<sup>9</sup> Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended\\_learning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended_learning)