Presentation by Mr Darren MCDERMOTT, Team Leader Designate, EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE)

Darren was asked to make a 10-minute presentation focusing on the following 3 questions to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are higher education internationalisation policies and practices currently, what is the status quo?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?

Defining Internationalisation

- A context bound concept
- An iterative and open-ended process
- A multi-dimensional, multi-modality initiative
- A transformative phenomenon of societies and for societies
- Less inclusive than it should be

Darren started his presentation by sharing that internationalization takes many forms and therefore its definition largely depends on the context. It depends on where we are coming from, what we want to achieve with it, what our core mission is, and who we are hoping to serve with it. It is not always easy to reach a sufficient definition. Internationalisation is about context, it is transformative, iterative, multi-dimensional and multimodal, but it is fair to say that it has been less inclusive than it should be despite institutions’ and governments’ best efforts.
Darren brought two quotes to illustrate how the definition of internationalisation could look like. Jane Knight better known for providing a definition for internationalisation, while Hans De Wit asks key questions like: why are we internationalizing, how are we doing it, and what do we want to reach with internationalization. Darren has also highlighted some recent and valuable studies that should be considered by the ARC8 Expert Group: “ACA Reflection Paper: Internationalisation for all? Wider inclusion in the internationalisation of HE” (Academic Cooperation Association, 2019); “Diversity, equity and inclusion in European higher education institutions; results from the INVITED project” (European University Association, 2019); “Study on Enhancing Intra-ASEAN University Student Mobility” (SHARE, 2019).

In addition, it is also important to note that the EU has approved the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme, and inclusion features heavily in it. The recent statements of the EU Commissioners support this fact:

Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, Commissioner for Promoting our European Way of Life, commented: "Erasmus is Europe's most emblematic programme, the jewel in our crown. The Erasmus generations represent the essence of our European way of Life. Unity in diversity, solidarity, mobility, support for Europe as an area of peace, freedom, and opportunities. With today's agreement, we are ready for the next and bigger Erasmus generations."

Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel said: "I welcome the political agreement on the new Erasmus+ programme. Erasmus+ is one of our flagship programmes. Over the last three decades, participation in Erasmus+ has boosted the personal, social, and professional development of over 10 million people, almost half of them between 2014 and 2020. With almost double the budget for the next programming period, we will now work to reach 10 million more over the next seven years." (Read the full 11 December 2020 press release here).

While the internationalization agenda of Europe is considerably more advanced than that of ASEAN, it is remarkable that ASEAN is catching up very quickly and there are concerted efforts to gather all of the stakeholders in the region and engage them in greater internationalisation initiatives.
The upcoming ASEAN workplan 2021-2025 will feature inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic initiatives to enhance people-to-people connectivity for the benefit of all countries in the region. Darren has shared that he has been involved in the SHARE program since its inception in 2015. The programme has achieved a significant engagement from ASEAN institutions and member states over the last five years and the two-year extension that has started in 2020 is about ensuring sustainability of the programme over the long term. The slide describes the main objectives of the SHARE programme: (1) Strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing quality and internationalisation of ASEAN Higher Education Institutions (2) Contributing to the harmonisation of ASEAN Higher Education through the formulation of regional frameworks (3) Supporting mutual recognition and equitable, diverse, and inclusive student mobility between HEIs in ASEAN to strengthen people-to-people connectivity (4) Supporting the strengthening of an ASEAN identity (Erasmus effect). The graphic on the same slide illustrates mobility flows among ASEAN countries. The red numbers relate to inbound students and the blue numbers refer to outbound students. There is a little bit of an imbalance in some countries, which will be addressed over the two-year extension period of the SHARE project.

The SHARE two-year extension will begin in January 2021 with the following main objectives:

- Take a participatory and inclusive approach in engaging the HE internationalisation knowledge and experiences in the region
- Stimulate and develop institutional capacity and ownership by ASEAN / regional organisations of SHARE Result Areas
- Further development of AQAN at operational level and strengthening and dissemination the AQAF at national and institutional levels
- Further support the development of an ASEAN branded scholarship
- Support HEIs in responding to ‘new normal’ for Higher Education under Covid-19

SHARE is working very closely not only with ministries but with higher education institutions and students in ASEAN trying to respond to the challenges of COVID19. According to Darren, we are looking at possibly the largest disruption to higher education student mobility in our lifetimes. Numbers of students that have had to been repatriated and go back to their own countries is phenomenal. Student mobility has been a buzzword for internationalisation, but just because it has been removed from the equation temporarily, it does not mean we should stop these activities and stop internationalizing.

This situation gives us the opportunity to reflect on our approach to internationalization and figure out how we internationalise without such a key modality as physical mobility. The question is how we are adapting and how do we ensure that we have robust approaches to internationalization in the future.

In this context there is an opportunity for us to maximize inclusion naturally. At the moment we have many more questions than answers, but the conclusions we arrive during COVID19 are going to assist us in plotting a route forward and find the road ahead for internationalization after COVID19.
Comments of Expert Group members on the Status Quo:

- In case of Vietnam the development of the education sector is an important strategic objective of the government, in order to help the global economic integration of the country. Enhancing quality of education has currently two main barriers: (1) lack of English language skills and (2) curriculum is designed on an annual basis instead of a credit approach. These two factors are barriers to internationalisation, as they do not allow for harmonisation of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance approaches across countries.

Comments of Expert Group members on Risks and Challenges:

- One potential risk is that we are underestimating the complexity of the task at hand and the engagement with what widening inclusion in international education activities actually mean. In Europe there is a very favourable policy context that has put inclusion in internationalisation at the forefront of the policy agenda. The risk is, that when processes are driven from a top-down approach and they come with a concrete set of indicators and objectives (e.g., Erasmus+ programme), then the process of inclusion is treated formally, in terms of compliance with those objectives, and we do not do the sort of foundational work to achieve real inclusion.

- Another challenge that we might face at the institutional level is related to the engagement of university leadership. This quest for widening inclusion in internationalization is very complex, and probably also comes with a lack of a full understanding of what inclusion in internationalisation actually means beyond mobility.

- There is a challenge in truly identifying the different groups of underrepresented students or unrepresented groups in general that we actually want to further engage in internationalization activities. We have a wide variety of practices in terms of defining those groups in different national and institutional contexts.

- From a student perspective, the most important risk lies in the lack of representation of already underrepresented students in international activities (e.g., students with disabilities, from lower socio-economic backgrounds, etc.)

- It is very important that we find out and determine within each internationalization context who is underrepresented. In some cases, it is not the usual suspects, for example in the ASEAN region male students are particularly underrepresented in international mobility activities, mobile students are overwhelmingly female, and we are talking about 75-80%.

- Inclusion in internationalisation is a difficult thing to measure, it is quite contextual, and we probably do not have good enough indicators yet, there is no best practice yet.

- There is a significant risk in neglecting the representation of underrepresented student communities e.g. disabled, socio-economically lower backgrounds in decision-making bodies.

Comments of Expert Group members on Opportunities:

- The Tokyo Convention and the Global Convention on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications offer a unique opportunity to create a new higher education zone, one that is more harmonised, has smoother recognition and quality assurance systems.

- There are a lot of opportunities in harmonising quality assurance frameworks. The existing regional frameworks (AUN, ECTS, etc) and the different online and virtual tools shall be combined.
▪ Opportunities shall be created for teaching staff and researchers as well, not only for students.

▪ Europe is very lucky to have favourable policy to address the issue of inclusion that also means that there is substantial funding available for this. It feels like we have left the phase of raising awareness on the issue and entered a phase where we can already implement solutions. At ESN inclusion is one of the main themes and in the past years projects and events were aiming at raising awareness on inclusion. In the last couple of years however, a solution-oriented approach became dominant.

▪ There are a lot of opportunities related to digitalization. Not only to modernize what we already do, but also to remove barriers. COVID19 has forced us to create many different digital opportunities. Due to the urgency and stress, the quality of these digital solutions was not always the highest, but it was a very good learning curve on what works and what does not. In the long run we shall implement more sustainable, online international activities. In Europe, the digital infrastructure is there.

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