

## African Academic Credit System (ACTS)

### Report of the Policy Country Visit to BENIN

(Cotonou, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024)

**Date:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – 8.30 – 12.00

**Location:** ISBA, Amphithéâtre Sadler, Benin (organised by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS))

#### ACTS Experts who participated in the visit:

- Marina Larrea (OBREAL)
- Pablo Beneitone (Higher Education Expert of OBREAL)
- Senghane Mbodji (Higher Education Expert of Senegal)
- Adewale Obadina (AAU)

#### List of participants from Benin are in the Appendix

#### 1. Purpose of the site visit

The aim of the National visits is to evaluate the implementation of the ACTS and to identify ways of strengthening integration and academic mobility at national level in Benin and at continental level. The objective of this meeting was to share the preliminary results of the study on the state of the art of the current situation of academic credits in higher education in African countries, with a view to gathering contributions for its validation and enrichment.

#### 2. Introduction

The meeting commenced with a welcome from the Technical Adviser to the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS), Professor Philippe Laleye, who reiterated the meeting's objectives. Attendees, listed in Appendix 1, introduced themselves, establishing a collaborative and formal environment for discussions.

#### 3. Presentations and Key Discussions

Marina Larrea presented the background of the HAQAA (Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation) project, outlining its goals for supporting higher education standards across Africa.

Senghane Mbodji presented the methodology he applied to the study on the state of the art of the credit system at the continental level. He also gave an introduction to the preliminary results achieved by the study at the level of West and Central Africa, as well as in Benin.

Pablo Beneitone presented the ACTS initiative, detailing the study findings relevant to Africa, and globally. He underscored the primary aim of ACTS: to serve as a common reference to align credit systems across African nations, thus facilitating academic mobility and credential recognition.

During the meeting, several key themes were addressed, revealing the scale and complexity of the process of harmonising credit systems in Africa, in particular through the ACTS initiative. First of all, institutions are central to the implementation of the system. Their role is crucial in adapting the workload and ensuring that learning outcomes are achieved consistently across institutions.

However, a recurring challenge highlighted was how to harmonise credits in disciplines as varied as physiology or education, which vary from one country to another, from one region to another, even from one institution to another within the same country. The size of the student groups was also discussed: a group of 300 does not have the same learning dynamic as a group of 20, but harmonisation must ensure that skills are acquired equitably.

Benin, for its part, has already begun to harmonise its credits between public and private universities, but questions remain. For example, with regard to the distribution of credits between theoretical courses, practical work and independent study time for students, ACTS proposes a flexibility that allows countries to adapt, but the need for an African reference framework for the distribution of these credits has been raised. This harmonisation on a continental scale remains to be clearly defined, so as not to compromise the systems already in place and the comparability between diplomas from different higher education systems.

The geographical extension of ACTS has also given rise to discussion, particularly on how the system could integrate the countries of East Africa. For many, harmonising credits would encourage academic mobility and the recognition of degrees across Africa, but some participants raised the issue of the varying infrastructures between countries: to what extent could these physical differences hinder harmonisation? In addition, the Diploma Supplement, while facilitating recognition, represents another challenge for universities.

Finally, a point of debate concerned the balance between student workload, target skills and the methodology used to structure academic programmes. The ultimate objective remains for students to acquire the expected learning outcomes, but it is necessary to find a balanced framework to achieve this, which brings us to the issue of mobility. While the ACTS system allows credits to be transferred internally within regions, such as ECOWAS, the challenge is to extend this capacity to the whole continent. To make progress, some participants suggested that a national credit management committee should be set up in each country, so that harmonisation can first take place locally before considering regional or continental integration.

All these interventions will guide the adaptation of further work for the next steps in the ACTS workstream under HAQAA3.

#### 4. Conclusion

The meeting provided an opportunity to take stock of the current status of the African Credit Transfer System in Benin and Central and West Africa, and to identify solutions to overcome the challenges associated with its implementation. Next steps include sharing the full study with participants, including details of the systems, conducting the regional hybrid workshop in Senegal, selecting the countries and institutions to pilot the ACTS, and a follow-up coordinated by HAQAA3 in collaboration with MESRS to ensure effective harmonisation of processes at national, regional and continental level.

#### 5. Opinion of the ACTS Technical Team on Benin's participation in the implementation phase

In the opinion of the ACTS Expert Team, Benin offers wide possibilities for participation in the implementation phase of ACTS. There was interest on the part of the participants, but no effective accompaniment from the authorities. They were not totally emphatic in their support for being part of an implementation phase, so it would be better to leave it for a second stage.