

Workshop on Mobility, Academic Recognition and the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS)

Nairobi, 10th September 2024

Kenia Regional Hybrid Event on an African Credit Transfer System was held in the framework of the 13th Annual East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Forum, organized by the East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN) in partnership with the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), provides a vital platform for dialogue on contemporary issues affecting higher education quality. The target participants of the Forum were the Quality Assurance Coordinators/Directors/Officers from Universities; Academics; University Researchers; University Administrators; Executives, Directors/Secretaries of National Accreditations Agencies, Regional Higher Education Agencies and Experts, Policy makers, Industry players, professional bodies, students and student unions (in Annex 1 the complete list of participants)

The event had a Workshop structured in 4 sessions (see Programme of the Kenya Regional Hybrid Event on ACTS in Annex 2).

Session 1 was introductory with a contextualisation of the HAQAA project and its importance for bi-regional dialogue. Apiyo Okwiri, representative of HAQAA3 management team made a presentation on the different lines of work of HAQAA 3 and highlighted the component linked to ACTS and its implementation.

A second presentation was made by Meshack Obonyo from IUCEA, who introduced the key elements of East African Community Students' Mobility Scholarship Scheme (EAC-SMS) and the EAC Staff Mobility Agenda for Regional Integration.

Session 2 began to explore in depth the topic of Recognition and Credit systems in Africa and other regions. Two presentations were made by Pablo Benitone and Robert Ayine.

Pablo Beneitone focused on key topics including the characteristics and challenges of credit systems and recognition processes across different regions. The presentation highlighted the transition from input-based, teacher-centered approaches to outcome-based, student-centered methodologies, emphasizing that recognition of studies requires a structured process reliant on credits and learning outcomes. The discussion extended to global credit systems, including the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and proposals for the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS), with findings indicating that students' average workload consists of approximately 35% contact hours and 65% independent study. Action items were established for future sessions, including a deeper exploration of the ACTS proposal and a debate on standardizing student workload metrics to enhance comparability across educational systems.

Robert Ayine addressed crucial aspects of credit systems and qualifications frameworks in the context of African education. Participants emphasized the significance of these systems in enhancing mobility and recognizing qualifications, exploring the balance between learner and teacher perspectives. Key discussions included the principles of credit systems applicable to various learning modes and challenges related to credit transfer percentages and weights among institutions. The presentation also considered the alignment of national qualifications with the African Continental Credit Transfer System, debating its potential as a prescriptive model or reference tool. New dimensions such as recognizing micro-credentials and displaced students were highlighted, alongside proposals for implementing

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Action items were identified, including determining acceptable credit transfer percentages and establishing guidelines for displaced students and RPL.

Session 3 focused on ACTS as a credit proposal for Africa, and two presentations were made, one by Pablo Beneitone and one by Anna Maria Nhampule.

Pablo Beneitone introduced the key elements of ACTS proposal. The presentation focused on introducing and developing the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS) to standardize higher education across the continent. Key discussions highlighted the need to transition from a teacher-centered credit calculation approach, based on contact hours, to a learner-centered system emphasizing student workload and specific, measurable learning outcomes. The proposed ACTS aims to enhance student mobility, facilitate lifelong learning, and implement the recognition of academic credentials. Plans include conducting regional consultations, selecting pilot countries and universities, and creating an online course to educate about curriculum design and workload assessment. Action items established during the meeting include validating existing credit system reports, selecting pilot countries and institutions, and developing an ACTS user guide to aid in the transition towards competency-based curricula in African higher education.

Anna Maria Nhampule presented preliminary findings on the state of the ACTS survey report in terms of the current situation regarding academic credits in higher education in African countries, and narrowed it down to Eastern Africa, with a view to gathering contributions for its validation and enrichment. She began with the conceptual and methodological framework of the state of the art study. It emerged that several countries in Africa had implemented national credit systems and qualifications framework under the aegis of the AU member states. Countries were at various stages of the implementation and had experienced varied successes. The Pan-African Quality Assurance Framework (PAQAF) was highlighted in terms of the instruments needed to operationalize it such as the Addis Convention, continental education strategy for Africa (CESA), African Standards and Guidance for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) and the register of relevant stakeholders. Anna Maria Nhampule also mentioned the methodology of the ACTS and the 47 countries that responded to the country specific survey.

At the end of Session 3, a space was opened for questions and clarifications. The Q&A session focused on the development and implementation of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACTS) and its role in regional mapping, credit recognition, and harmonization across Africa. Participants highlighted the challenges of aligning diverse national systems and the urgent need for qualification frameworks in several countries. Practical considerations included the need for actionable pathways to facilitate intra-African mobility and the effective operationalization of credit transfer schemes, with specific action items identified to promote harmonization and support for students within the framework.

Session 4 was organised in a workshop format. Participants were divided into groups composed of representatives from different countries. The discussion lasted 1 hour and two working topics were proposed:

- Topic 1 (at country level): Are any other Key elements which should be included in ACTS proposal? Which ones? What would be the main barriers for the uptake of ACTS in your country? How could these obstacles be overcome?
- Topic 2 (at institutional level): In order to install ACTS discussion in your institution, which strategies do you propose? Identify 5 main steps/strategies to be implemented; In order to inform the academic community in your institution about ACTS and its importance/relevance, which will be the procedure/strategies?

During the working session, participants collectively addressed the main challenges, opportunities, and strategies related to the improvement and implementation of credit transfer systems in higher education, with a particular focus on the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS).

Various structural and operational obstacles hindering the adoption of these systems were identified, including lack of resources, language barriers, institutional resistance to change, inconsistencies in prior qualifications, and low levels of institutional trust. Additionally, specific challenges were noted, such as the lack of harmonization in the calculation of notional learning and non-academic barriers like visa restrictions, which also affect student mobility.

In response to this context, participants proposed multiple strategies to facilitate the adoption and sustainability of credit systems. These included translating materials into different languages to overcome linguistic barriers, increasing budget allocations, and developing a comprehensive communication strategy to promote knowledge and understanding of ACTS within academic communities.

Regarding implementation, there was consensus on the importance of promoting harmonization processes and establishing standards for different qualification levels and types, alongside an advocacy and awareness strategy aimed at key educational stakeholders. The articulation of policies, institutional capacities, and active participation from students and faculty was highlighted as a key condition for the success of these systems.

At the end of the event, the future steps in relation to ACTS were presented. It was explained that between October and December 2024, HAQAA3 will be organizing two additional regional workshops with strategic partners in Africa, to share the findings of the state of the art study and compile recommendations for the next steps of ACTS endorsement and implementation in Africa. These regional workshops (In Senegal and Egypt, respectively), will be complemented by national policy visits. From this, the state of the art report will be finalized and translated into four official African languages (French, English, Portuguese and Arabic). The HAQAA3 Implementing Team will make a preliminary assessment/recommendation for 10 pilot countries for ACTS. The authorities of those countries will be asked to submit a proposal for participation in the pilot phase, accompanied by a national work plan that aligns to specific policy interests. Once approved, a cohort of universities will be selected to for the pilot phase, to accompany the national authority. The pilot phase will entail work at the level of study programmes and learning outcome design, as well as intra-African mobility and recognition and a broader training on the credit systems and their usage with respect to regional integration, recognition, mobility, lifelong learning, etc.