

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

Mauritius, 5 August 2024

A main deliverable of the first year of implementation of HAQAA3 in relation to one of the Working Line ACTS will be a Report on the state of the art on academic credit transfer systems in Africa. As part of this process, four regional hybrid events have been planned, to debate and discuss results and the implications for the further set-up and implementation of credit systems as well as the opportunities for increased student and staff mobility within Africa and the recognition of studies across borders. The outcomes will inform policy development, and a major pilot of the ACTS across the African continent. The meeting in Mauritius was the first of the four.

Mauritius Regional Hybrid Event on an African Credit Transfer System gathered 30 participants representing national quality assurance agencies, ministries of education and qualifications authorities in the SADC region (12 countries represented), associations of universities in Africa (The Association of African Universities – AAU - and the Inter-university council for East Africa – IUCEA) and experts in higher education integration from Europe. Approximately 20 representatives of Mauritian universities (DVC as well as director of quality assurance), as well as HEC and QQA staff, also participated (in Annex 2 the complete list of participants)

The event had a Workshop structured in 5 sessions (see Programme of the Mauritius Regional Hybrid Event on ACTS in Annex 1).

Session 1 was introductory with a contextualisation of the HAQAA project and its different phases, focusing on the current one. Elizabeth Colucci, General Coordinator of the project 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 Romeela Mohee, Higher Education Commissioner of Mauritius, who introduced the key elements of the Mauritian Higher Education system, and in particular she focused in two main aspects: National Credit Value and Transfer System Framework and Mauritius micro-credentials framework covering both the TVET and higher education sectors.

Session 2 began to explore in depth the topic of Recognition and Credit systems in Africa and other regions. Three presentations were made by Olusola Oyewole, Pablo Benitone and Ana Maria Nhampule.

Olusola Oyewole focused on the concept of academic credits as essential units of measurement for coursework in higher education, aiming to standardize these credits for improved learner mobility and recognition of qualifications across Africa. The presentation highlighted the importance of a robust credit system, which not only facilitates the accumulation and comparability of learning experiences but also serves as a quality assurance tool. Traditional views that prioritize teacher workload were contrasted with a learner-centered approach, emphasizing the need for a unified academic credit system amid the diverse and colonial-influenced credit frameworks present in various African countries. Aiming to address these challenges, his presentation included aspirations for developing the African Credit Transfer Scheme (ACTS) to enhance labor

mobility, lifelong learning opportunities, and the implementation of the Addis Ababa Convention 2014 for recognition of qualifications. Action items were proposed to further investigate degree-level credit requirements and promote ongoing discussions about credit system orientation.

The presentation of Pablo Beneitone was 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.

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 Southern Africa and Mauritius, 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.

Session 3 focused on ACTS as a credit proposal for Africa, and two presentations were made, one by Olusola Oyewole and one by Robert Ayine.

Olusola Oyewole 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.

The presentation for the African Credit Transfer Scheme focused on integrating various educational institutions and addressing key issues in developing a comprehensive credit transfer framework. Participants emphasized the necessity of including qualification authorities to facilitate access to universities and highlighted the importance of distinguishing between notional learning hours and actual student workload in credentialing. Concerns were raised about the narrow focus on universities, advocating for the inclusion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions to ensure a broader representation in the pilot project. The meeting also outlined the criteria for selecting countries and institutions based on regional needs and highlighted the significance of equitable access to education across the continent, particularly

regarding harmonized secondary schooling outcomes. Attendees were urged to actively contribute to the development of the scheme, with specific action items assigned to incorporate feedback and engage with national authorities for further collaboration.

The second presentation made in this Session 3 was given by Robert Ayine. The presentation 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.

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, particularly regarding the recognition of micro-credentials. The conversation drew parallels to Europe's pre-Bologna context, emphasizing the significance of standardized terminology for credit recognition, while also addressing the limitations of relying solely on credit as a measurement tool. 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 3 groups, two of them composed of representatives from different countries and a third group only with Mauritius authorities and academics. The discussion lasted 1.5 hours 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?

At the end of the discussions, a representative of each group made a synthesis of what had been discussed and presented it in a plenary session (session 5).

In Group 1, participants focused on developing a strategic proposal for enhancing the credit system in higher education through key elements such as emphasizing learning loads and aligning with regional frameworks like the African Continental Qualifications Framework. They identified significant barriers to the uptake of these acts, including language misunderstandings, resistance to change, and insufficient resources. To overcome these obstacles, the group proposed translating materials into multiple languages, increasing budget allocations, and developing a comprehensive communication strategy to raise awareness. A plan for launching the acts was also discussed, highlighting the need for advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and establishing partnerships for effective implementation. Action items were outlined, including

creating a digital information-sharing portal and organizing workshops to facilitate stakeholder involvement and support.

In Group 2, discussion focused on the implementation and improvement of Credit Transfer System policies across represented countries, highlighting existing challenges such as institutional mistrust and the varying degrees of success in policy adoption, as seen in Seychelles and Zimbabwe. Proposed improvements included fostering recognition demand to guide policy implementations, enhancing institutional trust, and promoting transparency in program development. Strategies discussed for launching these systems involved reviewing and harmonizing policies, establishing qualification standards, and engaging both academic staff and learners through awareness programs. The meeting concluded with a series of action items aimed at developing guidelines, capacity-building programs, and effective communication strategies to inform and engage the academic community regarding credit transfer systems.

In Group 3, composed only of representatives of Mauritius, the discussion was focused on the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS) proposal, emphasizing the need for comparability and mapping across regional and national frameworks, as well as the establishment of standards for various qualification types. Key barriers to ACTS implementation were identified, including inconsistencies in secondary qualifications, the necessity for a harmonized approach to notional learning calculation, and non-educational obstacles such as visa requirements. Participants discussed strategies to overcome these challenges, including the development of frameworks for recognition of prior learning and micro-credentials, enhancing institutional capacity, and creating supportive policies for credit transfer. The meeting concluded with a series of actionable items, such as developing mapping tools and establishing student mobility pathways to facilitate the efficient implementation of ACTS across institutions.

At the end of the event, the future steps in relation to ACTS were presented. It was explained that between September and November 2024, HAQAA will be organizing three 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 Nairobi, Egypt and Senegal, respectively), will be complemented by national policy visits, similar to the one that HEC received on 6 August, to explore in more depth the interests, concerns and priorities of national authorities. From this, the state of the art report will be finalized and translated into four official African languages (French, English, Portuguese and Arabic). The HAQAA 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.

Annex 1: Programme

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

Mauritius, 5 August 2024

VENUE: HOLIDAY INN MON TRESOR, MONTRESOR, MU, PLAINE MAGNIEN 51512, MAURITIUS

Objective

- To promote regional dialogue on the importance of ACTS for international mobility and academic recognition, with clear identification of the main challenges for its implementation and also proposals for its advancement.

Participants

- Max. 30 participants, including local universities' representatives that should be invited by the Mauritius' national authorities.

Agenda

- 8:30 – 8:50 Official welcome
- Marie Joelle Sandrine Valere, Senior Chief Executive of the Ministry of Education, Mauritius
 - Romeela Mohee, Higher Education Commissioner (HEC), Mauritius
 - EU Delegation to Mauritius - Tbc
 - Elizabeth Colucci, Director for International Projects, OBREAL/HAQAA3 initiative coordination
- 8:50 – 9:30 **Session 1: Introduction**
- HAQAA project and its importance for bi-regional dialogue. General presentation of the HAQAA3 initiative
Elizabeth Colucci, OBREAL/HAQAA3 Coordination
- Quality assurance system development, recognition and mobility in Mauritius
Romeela Mohee, Higher Education Commissioner (HEC), Mauritius
- Chair: Olusola Oyewole, Secretary General, Association of African Universities (AAU)
- 9:40 – 11:00 **Session 2: Recognition and Credit systems in Africa and other regions**
- (a) The Importance of the Credit System
Olusola Oyewole
- (b) Recognition and credit mobility at global level. Main characteristics of regional and national credit systems in Europe, Latin America & Asia.
Pablo Beneitone, Representative of HAQAA3 - ACTS Expert Team

(c) State of the Art of Credit Systems in Africa (some emphasis on Southern Africa and Mauritius) - Presentation of the study elaborated by ACTS Expert Team in relation to State of the Art of Credit Systems in Africa

Ana Nhampule, Representative of HAQAA3 - ACTS Expert Team, Mozambique

(d) Comments on the SADC CATS - Robin Sannasee, SADC Secretariat

(e) Guided discussion focussed on:

1. *Links between Africa context and other regions in relation to recognition & credit systems (similarities and differences between regions and Africa, including information on the SADC CATS).*
2. *It is considered a useful/critical tool in their higher education system.*
3. *Have regional credit systems been implemented yet at government and HEI level and what are the barriers?*
4. *Leveraging credits for harmonisation and quality enhancement/innovation/curricular flexibilisation within the national system.*
5. *Leveraging credits for student mobility at national and/or international level.*
6. *Whether credit is an agenda item in your institutions? How much importance do you give to it?*

Chair: Robert Ayine, Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)/ ACTS Expert Team

11.00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 – 12:30 **Session 3: ACTS: a credit system proposal for Africa**

(a) Key elements of ACTS proposal: Student Workload measurement as a basis of ACTS

Olusola Oyewole, Secretary General, AAU

(b) Connection of ACTS with other recognition mechanisms and credit systems in Africa

Robert Ayine, IUCEA/ACTS Expert Team

(c) Guided discussion focussed on:

1. *What improvements does the adoption of a credit like ACTS mean for your country?*
2. *How does this ACTS proposal connect with your higher education system?*
3. *How would ACTS help in connecting your system with other national and/or international systems?*

Chair: Ana Nhampule, Representative of HAQAA3 - ACTS Expert Team, Mozambique

12.30 – 14.00 **Lunch**

14:00 – 15:30

Session 4: Group Discussion 1

Brief Introduction to Work Discussion: Presentation of Questions to be discussed and answer in each group/ Group composition (5 or 6 groups).

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?*
- Summary and preparation of a short report to be presented at plenary session which should answer all the questions in Topic 1 and 2 and at least 2 recommendations for ACTS implementation

15:30 – 16:30

Session 5: Reporting back and recommendations

Reporting from groups about internal discussion and main findings / agreements in relation to Topic 1 and 2.
Recommendations for the future

Chair: Pablo Beneitone, ACTS Expert Team

16.30 – 17.00

Brief presentation of next steps under the HAQAA3 ACTS Work Area
Pablo Beneitone and Olusola Oyewole, ACTS Expert Team

Closing remarks – HAQAA Coordination (Olusola Oyewole/ Elizabeth Colucci)