

African Academic Credit System (ACTS)

Report of the Policy Country Visit to SOUTH AFRICA

(Pretoria, 2nd August 2024)

Date: Friday 2nd August 2024 – 10.00 – 12.00

Location: Umhlangano Room in the Council of Higher Education office building (1 Quintin Brand Street, Perseus Technopark, Tshwane)

ACTS Experts who participated of the visit:

- Robert Ayine (Higher Education Expert of IUCEA)
- Ana Maria Nhampule (Higher Education Expert of Mozambique)
- Pablo Beneitone (Higher Education Expert of OBREAL)
- Nodumo Dhlamini (AAU)

List of participants from the Council of Higher Education:

- Dr Whitfield Green – Chief Executive Officer
- Dr Sanele Nene – Director: National Standards and Reviews
- Dr Amani Saidi – Director: Research, Monitoring and Advice
- Dr Phumzile Dlamini – Director: Management of the HEQSF
- Dr Britta Zawada – QAF Implementation Coordinator
- Mr Ntokozo Bhengu – Communications and Stakeholder Relations Manager

1. Purpose of the site visit

- Validation and enrichment of the data provided by the countries through the responses to the Mapping Study Questionnaire, with a particular focus on data on South Africa and SADC.

2. Objectives of the meetings:

- Presentation of ACTS initiative and its importance for international mobility and academic recognition.
- Discussion with participants for the identification of the main challenges for the implementation of ACTS at national level.

3. Brief Description of the main Higher Education Policy Development at National Level in different fields

Higher Education in South Africa is regulated and supervised by the Council for Higher Education (CHE). CHE is an independent statutory body established in terms of the provision of the Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended. CHE advises the Minister responsible for higher education and training, and is the national authority for external quality assurance and promotion in higher education, in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended. The CHE is the Quality Council for higher education responsible for, among others, the development, further development and management of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework.

4. Description of the visit

The visit focused presentation of the report from the survey on Credit System being implemented in South Africa and also getting an understanding of how credit system is being implemented and the

related challenges. This document records the main aspects to be retained from the interactions that took place at the meeting and, at the end, presents the opinion of the members of the ACTS Technical Team on the possibilities and challenges of South Africa's participation in the implementation phase of ACTS.

5. Commitment of the policy authorities with ACTS implementation phase

The discussion focused on what ACTS was all about and the processes undertaken and realized. CHE on its part was not completely comfortable to commit. They cited their mandate and autonomy as prescribed in their laws. They requested to know whether ACTS was a prescriptive or reference tools. South Africa seems to be more comfortable in working with a reference position and those were unable to commit.

6. Systematisation and analysis of topic exchange during the visit

The discussions focused on issues surrounding Credit System. The following were discussed:

- The credit system is embedded with the National Qualifications Framework which is 10 level. The NQF is residual at the South Africa Qualifications Authority and is responsible for the development and Management. However, CHE manages the sub-sector framework for higher education which is part of the NQF.
- SAQA and CHE work together quite closely. For instance, Accreditation of institutions and programmes is done by CHE while SAQA registers the qualifications and recognizes it. The qualifications that are recognized are enlisted in the data base. CHE has developed a South African Credit system that guides institutions in conducting transfers and facilitating mobility.
- Informed that the CHE does not have data on transfers which are implemented at the institutional level. South African policies allow for recognition of qualifications based on the credit system. The maximum credits that can be transferred should not be more than 50%.

The following pertinent questions were asked by the CHE Team:

- a. What would be the implications of adopting ACTS?
- b. What are the expectations from countries in relation to the ACTS?
- c. What is the average length of an academic year in Africa?
- d. Within the SADC is the reference being made to completed qualifications or credits accumulated?
- e. What could be the role of PAQAA in relation to national QAA systems?
- f. What is the purpose of ACTS – different countries have different credit systems. Is the intention of ACTS to replace national systems or is it a reference system?
- g. Can we impose a credit system to African countries?
- h. Why was ACTS benchmarked against the ECTS only? What about benchmarking it against Asia and global south?
- i. What methodology was used for the ACTS proposal? Did you start with the proposal to align with the ECTS before conducting the research?
- j. Does the ACTS report address the African political and legal frameworks?
- k. Does the ACTS have African Union endorsement? The absence of supporting legislation has an impact on its implementation.
- l. Is there a desire for ACTS to appear on certificates?

The Responses to the questions were as follows

- The average length of total academic years depends on the programmes. Social Sciences are 3 years and medicine is 6 years.
- PAQAA aims to be an oversight of African QAA. We have African Standards and Guidelines. African National QA agencies will continue to do their work. PAQAA aims to promote open quality assurance and accreditation systems. Peer reviews will be key activities under PAQAA.

- The is micro credentials. The example of war that broke out in Sudan rendered thousands of students unable to continue with their learning. They were also unable to be absorbed by other African Universities because they needed to demonstrate credits accumulated and negotiate for credit transfers as individuals.
- ACTS aims to create a common understanding of students workloads.
- The intention is not to replace national systems and frameworks. ACTS is a reference system that will promote harmonization of African Education Systems
- University policies must align with national systems. We don't intend to impose a credit transfer system.

7. Emerging issues

- The issue of the legal mandate of ACTS was brought out and how it will work within legal frameworks in National levels amidst respect for sovereignty.
- Universities in South Africa are obliged to adhere to regulations by CHE. Multiple requirements may cause confusion.
- The issue of micro-credentials was also emphasized.
- The CATS should be a reference tool that can be referred to to understand systems elsewhere and facilitate mobility.

8. Opinion of the ACTS Technical Team on South Africa's participation in the implementation phase

The visit was a success and provided a clearer picture in terms adoption and adaption of the ACTS policy. There is need to ensure acceptability by providing an option that is easily understood and acceptable to the stakeholders. From the discussion and assessment, South Africa is not willing to commit to the ACTS and its implementation but willing to work in other areas that promote quality in higher education in Africa. The issue of accreditation was also not well appreciated. There is need to think through it.