



## Meeting Report of the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Review Meeting of Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme

Virtual Meeting on 26 November 2020

- 1 The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Review Meeting of the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme was held virtually through Zoom on 26 November 2020. The Meeting was co-organised by SEAMEO RIHED and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines. The Meeting Programme appears as **Appendix 1**.
- 2 183 participants attended the Meeting. This included government officials and their designated representatives from Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and university representatives from all 9 AIMS Member Countries. Representatives from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia and Cambodian universities also participated in the Meeting as observers.

### Opening

- 3 Dr Chantavit Sujatanond, Centre Director of SEAMEO RIHED, welcomed participants to the Meeting. She conveyed her gratitude to CHED for their full support in co-organising the Meeting. Noting the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on higher education and student mobility, she emphasised to put forward a dialogue on virtual initiatives in the AIMS Programme and that the Meeting aims to bring the members together in exploring ideas for collaborations.
- 4 In her remarks, Dr Lilian A. De Las Llagas, Commissioner of the CHED, conveyed that despite challenges imposed by the pandemic, the trend and need for international cooperation in higher education remains relevant. She highlighted the benefits of providing study abroad experiences to students including the opportunity to develop various skills and competencies as well as the global and regional mindset. She expressed that the AIMS Programme will continue to be a platform to bring stakeholders together and promote further regional collaborations and internationalisation.
- 5 On behalf of AIMS member universities from the Philippines, Dr Peter Laurel, President of Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas, expressed his gratitude to the organisers and participants for the opportunity to virtually come together at the Meeting. He mentioned that the pandemic brought ongoing challenges, but it does not limit the region's ability to continue to dialogue and connect, and the AIMS Programme to further develop based on mutual trust and recognition.

### Programme Updates

- 6 SEAMEO RIHED presented the Programme overview and recent updates. With the impact of the pandemic, member universities have been facing challenges in operating student mobility. SEAMEO RIHED provided the results of a survey conducted on member universities between

March and May 2020, showing that there have been various measures taken by respective institutions in response to the pandemic. The survey indicated that while 60 per cent of member universities had faced the physical closure of their campuses, the other 40 per cent had continued the operation of universities without the physical shut-down. The shift to online learning was identified as a general trend, replacing activities previously conducted face-to-face including classes, assessments, and orientations.

- 7 In the survey, universities reported challenges in transitioning to online learning, including the lack of sufficient ICT infrastructure, the adjustment to online learning and teaching by both students and faculty staff and the limited know-how of online student assessment and evaluation. Also, universities indicated challenges in ensuring student support and communication, particularly the communication with host universities and students and the provision of support to students' mental and physical wellbeing. Some pointed out the challenge in offering opportunities for cultural exposure while physical activities are restricted.
- 8 SEAMEO RIHED also informed that the 5<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee (SC) Meeting had virtually been held in August 2020 in collaboration with Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam. With the SC Members from 9 Member Countries, the 5<sup>th</sup> SC Meeting discussed the possibility of promoting integrating virtual collaborations among member universities of the AIMS Programme. Matters concerning Programme disciplines and university social responsibilities were tabled and the Meeting agreed that SEAMEO RIHED circulates surveys among all member universities to collect their input for the SC to make informed decisions. Additionally, it was reported that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) of Cambodia had submitted the Letter of Interest to SEAMEO RIHED for its future participation in the AIMS Programme.
- 9 SEAMEO RIHED presented the latest update of mobility data. The total number of student participation has reached 5,088 since 2010, with the addition of 124 students who joined the physical mobility in the year 2020. It was informed that mobility in 2020 had dropped by 85 per cent compared to the figure in the previous year due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

#### **Launch of New AIMS Website**

- 10 SEAMEO RIHED introduced the new website of the AIMS Programme ([www.aims-rihed.net](http://www.aims-rihed.net)). The rework of the website was pursued not only to communicate key information of the Programme but also to enhance the connectivity among the members, serving as a useful platform for higher education stakeholders and the public in the region to gain knowledge of the Programme information and development.
- 11 The website features the University Profile page, on which viewers can access relevant information on all member universities, including disciplines offered, academic calendar, available courses, and contact information. The current information shown on the page is based on the information submitted to SEAMEO RIHED in the previous years, and universities would be able to update or revise their information by submitting the revision form provided in the login page of the website.

## Country Report

- 12 SEAMEO RIHED invited ministry representatives of AIMS Member Countries to share a national update of Programme implementation, including the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on student mobility and national responses. Representatives from Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam presented the country report.
- 13 Ms Tsuchiya Sakiko, Specialist from Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Japan, presented that the restrictions of entry of foreign nationals under the COVID-19 situation are gradually being eased. From the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, all foreigners with mid and long-term residence status can enter the country with mandatory testing (except for specific countries) and 14-day quarantine period. It is expected that the number of foreign nationals including international students will increase, and support from respective universities is crucial for admitting international students. In response to the pandemic, the government of Japan provides emergency aid to current students with the financial difficulties including international students to continue their study while various measures are taken by universities such as the postponement and exemption of tuition payment and the provision of supplementary lectures. The use of online classes has also been promoted through providing the government fund to strengthen the institutional infrastructure necessary for online learning.
- 14 Dr Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim, Executive Secretary of AIMS Malaysia, reported that as of November 2020, physical teaching and learning is not allowed in Malaysia as most universities are put under physical closure. Due to the ongoing border control, entry to the country is limited only to current international students. The government of Malaysia continues to provide funding to support various activities planned in 2021 under the AIMS Programme, including the workshop to promote research collaboration among AIMS member universities, international webinar, a workshop for international office and AIMS international student forum. While the Malaysian government strengthens the implementation of online learning during the pandemic, it envisages promoting the application of blended and virtual mobility in the post-pandemic period.
- 15 Ms Lim Siew Lee, Assistant Director of International Cooperation & Strategy Team from the Ministry of Education, Singapore, reported that most students are currently attending classes on campus with safe management measures in place. Due to the ongoing travelling restrictions in many countries, international exchanges and internships continue to be suspended. International students who cannot travel to Singapore have the options to either take part in remote learning or take a leave of absence for the term. In response to the pandemic, the government suspended the loan repayment for graduate students by one year and provided relief packages and socio-emotional support to students in need. As the mobility of students continues to be restricted, Nanyang Technological Institute (NTU) intends to focus on other types of academic collaborations with partner universities with a mechanism to transfer credits.
- 16 Dr Somkiat Kamolpun, Acting Director of Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy from Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI), Thailand, presented that universities under the AIMS Programme in the country have implemented blended learning for degree programmes since July or August of 2020. On the other hand, exchange and internship programmes are put on hold until January 2021 while some are partially replaced by virtual activities. In response to the pandemic, universities played a role in raising public awareness and provided financial relief, employment sponsorship as well as student support and services. The government encourages universities to utilise technology to ensure the continuity of learning and

provide capacity building for digital competencies, recognising the potential of technology in complementing or replacing physical mobility.

- 17 Ms Min Ji Park, Deputy Director of International Education Cooperation Division, Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, presented that in the post-pandemic period, the government plans to encourage member universities to develop online courses. The government provides support to the development of online and blended learning programmes, including financial support to set up necessary institutional infrastructures. Also, the government eased credit regulations by eliminating the limit of credits students acquire from online courses for all degree programmes while granting the increased autonomy to universities in designing credit requirements.
- 18 Atty Lily Freida M Milla, OIC, Deputy Executive Director and Director of International Affairs Staff from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines provided the country update, informing that exchange and internship programmes abroad are currently under the temporary suspension. The government made psychosocial support and interventions available to students and faculties, and financial aids in a form of subsidy and allowance are also provided for qualified students affected by lockdown across the country. The admission of new students in the AIMS Programme for the year 2020-2021 will be allowed only if universities can offer online courses entirely. In the post-pandemic, the government plans to promote the learner-centred flexible learning approach through utilising both digital and non-digital tools. In an attempt of this, the government has issued implementation guidelines to universities and offered training programmes to faculties.
- 19 Dr I Made Andi Arsana, Head of Office of International Affairs from Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia, noted that the increasing number of classes are offered online under exchange programmes nationwide including the AIMS Programme. With the increased utilisation of technology in higher education, the government of Indonesia recognises the need to redefine mobility. It also suggested to strengthen research collaboration, institutionalise an alumni network, and initiate virtual course collaboration in selected AIMS disciplines, which would then contribute to maintaining collaboration among Member Countries of the AIMS Programme. In view of the enhanced role of online learning in student mobility in the post-pandemic, the government of Indonesia emphasised to integrate cultural components to academic courses.
- 20 Dr Dao Hien Chi, a Senior Expert from Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam, informed that due to the restrictions imposed from the pandemic, there has been little physical mobility of students taking place in the country throughout the year for both the inbound and outbound flows. While physical mobility has been put on hold, the government promotes blended learning in collaboration with universities though it remains a challenge for universities to offer online courses in English. It was informed that the government of Vietnam does not currently provide financial support to member universities for their participation in the AIMS Programme, which remains the biggest challenge for national implementation, noting that the inactiveness of some member universities also appears as a concern. It was shared that the Ministry is currently preparing to nominate International University of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) as a new member to join the AIMS Programme.

### **AIMS Dialogue on Virtual Mobility (Plenary)**

- 21 The session invited representatives from AIMS member universities who are at the forefront in implementing virtual mobility initiatives in their respective institutions to share their experiences and perspectives on key aspects of virtual mobility. The session was facilitated in the form of an open panel discussion, moderated by Dr Laurene Chua-Garcia, Vice President for External Relations and Internationalization of De La Salle University. The panel was joined by 3 representatives, namely, Assoc. Prof. Dr Nakao Nomura, Director of Division of International Exchange Support, Global Commons at the University of Tsukuba, Dr Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim, Senior Lecturer and AIMS Coordinator from Universiti Malaysia Sabah, and Fr. Jose M. Cruz, SJ, Vice President for University and Global Relations of Ateneo de Manila University.
- 22 The panel discussed how they got different members of the academic community involved in the process of implementing virtual mobility. It was shared that within some contexts, stakeholders within universities and partner universities had expressed reluctance towards virtual mobility due to its limited capacity to provide intercultural learning in comparison with physical mobility. Therefore, one challenge was to have dialogue and establish a mutual understanding of the benefits of virtual mobility. Another point mentioned was to utilise pre-existing projects or networks that had been supported by the government or universities themselves as platforms to promote virtual mobility initiatives to make a smooth transition during the pandemic.
- 23 Regarding teaching and learning strategies adopted in virtual mobility platforms, the panel expressed a general agreement that learning through online platforms requires different pedagogical approaches from face-to-face learning in a classroom. The panel emphasised the integration of self-learning components and provision of a common space for collaborative learning on online platforms wherein teachers take a facilitation role to support discussion and student-centred learning. Some practices of course development were also shared including the involvement of industry partners in designing teaching and learning process and joint curriculum development by multiple faculties.
- 24 The panel discussed how virtual mobility can be used as an inclusion strategy in higher education. Virtual mobility possesses a potential in widening access to learning to people with disabilities by removing physical barriers they would otherwise encounter in face-to-face learning. On the other hand, the panel shared some instances, in which students with specific disabilities require physical interaction and online modality hinders their learning experience. The panel also pointed out the use of online tools for the inclusion of senior citizens in learning space by bringing together different generations to exchange knowledge and promote lifelong learning.

### **AIMS Dialogue on Virtual Mobility (Breakout)**

- 25 Drawing points from the plenary dialogue, participants were invited to join one of the 3 topics for discussion on key aspects of virtual mobility. The topics were Virtual Course Design, Virtual Assessment, and Virtual Support Activities. The discussion was led by facilitators and the participants shared their institutional practices and views on challenges and opportunities of virtual mobility.

### *Virtual Course Design*

- 26 Jointly facilitated by Dr Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim and Assoc. Prof. Dr Nakao Nomura, the Virtual Course Design group discussed how current trends and developments in online teaching and learning can be included within the disciplines of the AIMS Programme. In sharing ongoing practices of online learning during the pandemic, the participants highlighted existing challenges in facilitating the acquisition of skills and knowledge associated with practical learning. A challenge was identified in science-related disciplines, for which a laboratory experiment or fieldwork forms a critical means of data collection. Some universities put practical learning components on hold during the pandemic while others adopted alternative methods to carry them out on online platforms, including the use of recorded experiment procedures.
- 27 Participants also indicated the importance as well as the challenge of assuring learning outcomes on online learning. They expressed a shared concern that some learning outcomes are specifically designed in the context of face-to-face learning and often need to be adjusted to online learning. In moving forward, the virtual mobility initiatives under the AIMS Programme, potential ideas were exchanged, including a short-term virtual programme and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaborations.

### *Virtual Assessment*

- 28 The discussion on virtual assessment was facilitated by Dr Gil Jacinto, Assistant Vice President and Director of Office of International Linkages at the University of the Philippines. Participants shared good practices and lessons learnt in developing assessment for online and collaborative learning. One of the existing practices shared was the use of varying assessment methods depending on what students' skills a lecturer assess. For example, a lecturer adopts online multiple-choice exams for assessing students' lower-order thinking skills while virtual collaborative group activities such as group presentation are used to assess their higher-order thinking skills.
- 29 The group also discussed that although there are often similarities in methods used between online and face-to-face assessment, online assessment offers the possibility of utilising various online tools to assist lecturers to enhance their communication with students, facilitate interaction between students themselves and collect their feedback.

### *Virtual Support Activities*

- 30 Facilitated by Dr Laurene Chua-Garcia, the group discussed how universities can leverage technology and promote cultural exchange and exposure. Participants introduced the initiative of virtual cultural visits, supported by technologies available such as augmented reality, which provides international students with an opportunity to virtually visit cultural sites in a host country.
- 31 Universities can also carry out other various cultural activities online to promote cultural exchange among students. One of the common initiatives shared was an interactive cooking session through which students introduce their own food culture to one another. While some of the initiatives shared were primarily focused on cultural activities, others presented learning programmes, of which contents are more academic, such as human rights or sustainable development, with collaborative components embedded to promote intercultural communication.

### **The Venue of the 15th AIMS Annual Review Meeting**

- 32 The Republic of Korea delivered video presentation and introduced that Ministry of Education is currently preparing to host the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Review Meeting in 2021.

### **Wrap Up and Closing**

- 33 Dr Chantavit Sujatanond expressed her appreciation to participants for their contributions during discussions as well as to CHED, the Philippines, for their support in co-organising the Meeting. She noted that the AIMS Programme aims to play an active role in enhancing virtual collaboration at the regional level and based on the inputs obtained through the Meeting, SEAMEO RIHED will organise a series of online consultations in 2021 with each discipline to facilitate joint virtual course development among member universities.
- 34 The Meeting was concluded at 16:00 (GMT+7).