

## **PROGRESS MADE IN UMAP AND THE ANTICIPATORY ROLE OF THE REGIONAL CONVENTION**

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I greatly appreciate the invitation which has been given to me by the organisers to speak today to participants in this most important conference. I regard UNESCO very highly indeed for what it has accomplished, particularly in the Asia/Pacific region, in its efforts to contribute to the development of higher education. I certainly also appreciate the significance of the task it is undertaking in promoting wider recognition of the value of awards given to those who have undertaken various levels of higher education studies. I am well aware of just how difficult the latter task is and I hope that this conference will make some further progress towards the achievement of a higher level of recognition in countries throughout the region of academic work successfully undertaken in other parts of the region.

I have been invited to participate as UMAP Co-ordinator and I am happy to talk about the limited experience of UMAP with the issue which is the theme of this conference. In fact, the UMAP program to date has not done much more than accept that the recognition of qualifications obtained in other parts of the region poses very serious difficulties for student exchanges. In consequence, the designers of the UMAP student exchange arrangements have looked for ways of overcoming the total problem in the first instance and hope that the success of UMAP arrangements will help to alleviate and, eventually, overcome the barriers raised by an unwillingness or inability to give proper recognition to other country qualifications.

I expect most participants in this conference will know something about UMAP - the acronym for University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific. For the benefit, however, of others who do not know much about it, I will impose on the tolerance of those who are familiar with the program and describe its origins, and what it is intended to achieve.

The general objective of UMAP is to achieve, by extended and enhanced co-operation between higher education institutions, a better understanding within the countries and territories of the Asia/Pacific region of the cultural, economic and social systems of the region - by increasing the mobility of higher education students and staff and improving the quality of higher education in the region.

Participants in this conference will appreciate that the development which I describe is certainly not unique to our region. In most countries around the world, as they move to adjust their economies in order to prepare for the challenges of an ever-more competitive world, there is recognition of the growing importance of education and training. Better access to higher education and greater knowledge of educational developments in other

parts of the world are seen as vital to the education of a work force and leaders who can understand and compete successfully in difficult international markets and in an interdependent world.

Increasingly rapid and more accessible communication and transport systems, combined with a recognition of the degree to which the interests of countries are in fact interdependent, have pointed to the need for people who can operate across national boundaries and cope with differing economic, legal, language, political and cultural circumstances. In short, the products of education and training systems need, increasingly, to have an international outlook. These, I believe, are the factors which have influenced universities in the Asia/Pacific region to seek ways of exposing their students to the cultures and economic systems of other countries.

The first steps towards the establishment of UMAP were taken by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC), with the support of the Australian Government, which sponsored two conferences to promote discussion on educational co-operation in the region (Hong Kong, April 1991, and Canberra, September 1991). The Hong Kong meeting was a preliminary one which canvassed the views of a small number of regional representatives on whether it would be worth pursuing means of extending and enhancing higher education co-operation in the region. A favourable reaction at that initial meeting encouraged the AVCC to convene the meeting in Canberra which was attended by representatives of some 18 countries and territories in the region. It was agreed at the Canberra meeting that a program for increasing mobility of staff and students should be introduced. The participants established themselves as a Reference Group on Higher Education Co-operation in the Asia/Pacific Region. They appointed a working party to develop proposals for educational mobility, to promote UMAP with regional organisations and to obtain the support of governments for the scheme. Representatives of virtually all countries and territories present at the Canberra conference, and some additional ones, came together again for a meeting in Seoul, in April 1992. Assisted by a series of recommendations from the working party, the Reference Group agreed on the objectives of UMAP and on the general conditions which should apply for the implementation of a trial UMAP program. It agreed to introduce a trial program, deciding that steps should be taken to identify institutions and/or countries or territories prepared to nominate some projects for staff and/or student mobility which are generally consistent with the framework decided upon by the Reference Group so that they might be used to assess the suitability of the framework as a step towards determining formats for a more permanent program for extending and enhancing higher education co-operation in the region.

In order to move towards achievement of the general UMAP objective, the Seoul meeting agreed that the program aimed:

to increase significantly the number of active bilateral agreements among higher education institutions, and consortia of institutions and others, in the Asia/Pacific region and by such means to foster internationalisation of curricula and teaching through exchanges of students and staff.

to expand a program of student exchanges based on bilateral and consortium agreements, with the period of student residence in another country or territory being of a duration sufficient to allow an appropriate language/acclimatisation course in addition to a regular undergraduate semester course load.



- to identify and overcome progressively the impediments to higher education student mobility by agreements between individual institutions and organisations, reinforced by supportive government action where necessary.
- to foster bilateral institution and business enterprise relationships in countries and territories of the region on co-operative education and/or work placement models, including allowing students to take a period of work experience in an enterprise in a country or territory within the region as part of an accredited course; and
- to establish, over an appropriate time scale, a small, cost-effective organisational structure comprising identified co-ordinating organisations in each country or territory, a representative group to guide UMAP policies and practices, and a minimum-sized secretariat located in a suitably central city.

The meeting of the Seoul Reference Group requested the working party to:

- collect examples of the varying kinds of agreements between governments, organisations and institutions which provide a model of various types that have proved effective and could be used to assist parties wishing to draw up new agreements; and
- do further work to identify impediments to international exchange programs, and study best practices in overcoming them in order to recommend practical solutions to facilitate university mobility in the region.

Both of these tasks were completed. The working party distributed to participating countries copies of a publication containing some examples of the agreements which have been in force for a reasonably long time and have been found satisfactory by the partners to the agreement. A survey was undertaken by the Working Party to obtain information and views on various obstacles to increased student mobility and these were the subject of a workshop session at the third meeting of the Reference Group which took place in Taipei on 14 April 1993.

A number of factors were identified as possible impediments to exchange arrangements. They include: differing academic years and lengths of courses; credit transfer; recognition of professional qualifications; immigration restrictions; financial assistance for participating staff and students; and language difficulties. The second and third of these are, of course, very closely related to the issues being discussed at this UNESCO Conference. In all cases, pragmatic solutions have been sought to minimise the seriousness of the obstacles. For example, it was accepted that language requirements would vary according to whether a student enrolled in an undergraduate course taught in the language of the host country, a research/postgraduate course in the host country language, a mainly research/postgraduate course requiring less knowledge of the host country language, or a course offered in, say, English in a country where the vernacular is a language other than English. The precise standard of knowledge of the host language would be determined by negotiation between the two institutions involved.

In the case of credit transfer, it was agreed that it would not be practicable, initially at least, to decide on country or system-wide credit transfer arrangements. It was expected that staff exchanges or visits would enable sufficient confidence to be built up between institutional partners to a bi-lateral agreement about the curriculum content and standards in particular courses to enable home institutions to allow credit for study successfully undertaken at the host institution. Similarly, where study aimed at a professional qualification entailed some study as part of an exchange program, it would again be necessary only to have the home and host institution agree beforehand on the value to be placed by the home institution on the program to be studied at the host institution.

It was agreed at the Taipei meeting that information about the outcomes of the survey on impediments to academic exchanges and suggested means of overcoming them should be distributed to participants. It was regarded as most important that projects for exchanges should be aimed at achieving approximate reciprocity and be implemented with maximum flexibility.

Each country delegation at the Taipei meeting reported briefly on steps which had been taken within the country to implement UMAP programs. The reports indicated varying degrees of government support and pointed out funding difficulties in some countries but, overall, they showed that an encouraging amount of success had been achieved in the initial stage of a quite ambitious program. Decisions were taken for the Reference Group to meet next in Osaka, in December 1994, by which time it was expected that some additional judgements would be possible on the effectiveness of trial programs and that further work carried out in the meantime by the working group should provide a basis for decisions on more permanent arrangements for an effective regional mobility program.

The following countries and territories have participated in one or more of the Reference Group meetings held in Canberra, Seoul and Taipei: Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Guam, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Samoa, Singapore, South Pacific, Taiwan, Thailand, The People's Republic of China, The Philippines, the United States of America, and Vietnam.

The UMAP Reference Group recognises that there are already many valuable linking arrangements between higher education institutions in the region and that a large number of these provide for staff and student exchanges. UMAP is intended to supplement and complement arrangements already in place by offering new possibilities. Each country or territory or university is free to decide what linking arrangements it wishes to have with overseas institutions and the ways in which its exchange schemes should operate. It is expected that all will welcome the additional opportunities that UMAP will provide for their staff and students.

I would like now to address in a little more detail the identified impediments to student exchange which I referred to briefly a little earlier in this presentation - credit transfer and the recognition of professional qualifications, both of which bear on the matter which is the principal concern of this conference.

Participants in this conference will appreciate that the discussions about UMAP have primarily been concerned with means of implementing effective student exchange arrangements. It was therefore seen as important that ways be found to try to ensure that students undertaking a semester or more at another university in the region should be able



to receive full credit at the home university for studies successfully completed at the host institution. This was desirable so that students would not have to extend, or extend unduly, the time taken to obtain the qualification for which they were enrolled. It was accepted that in some cases students needing to undergo intensive language training in order to be able to be enrolled in ordinary courses at a host institution might require additional time. The aim, however, was to create situations where, with the assistance of appropriately designed study programs, competent students with a certain amount of prior language study could take courses at other regional universities, while improving their language proficiency, and obtain appropriate credit for studies undertaken.

At the request of the UMAP working party, a survey of a wide range of regional institutions was conducted by Professor Ippei Yamazawa of Hitotsubashi University, who is a member of the working party and a prime mover in Japanese participation in UMAP. Professor Yamazawa indicated in his report on the results of the survey that there seems to be widespread recognition in the region of university degrees obtained in universities in other countries of the region. The survey found that bachelors' degrees were usually accepted as valid for entry to graduate courses in other institutions and that PhD degrees obtained abroad are generally acceptable for teaching and research posts in home countries.

On the other hand, the survey showed that recognition of professional qualifications obtained abroad is still restricted. Professional qualifications for lawyers, medical practitioners, accountants and the like are usually accepted only in respect of those who pass further qualifying examinations in their home countries. Comparable professional qualifications obtained abroad are usually not accepted or are accepted only with strict conditions applying. Observations from respondents to the survey indicated the ratification of the UNESCO convention on recognition of qualifications is sometimes delayed because of reservations of professional associations or government bodies with the authority to recognise particular professional qualifications.

It was certainly the very strong view of respondents and members of the working party that mutual recognition of qualifications is desirable in order to activate the mobility of professional personnel throughout the region. It was also indicated that there have been apparent but gradual moves by institutions around the region, to standardise curricula leading to a number of professional qualifications and it was noted that this should promote wider recognition.

Those involved in the discussions about the UMAP program recognised, before the results of Professor Yamazawa's survey were known, that there were difficulties in obtaining appropriate recognition of studies undertaken at institutions elsewhere in the region. It was judged, however, that, while it was highly desirable that there be general recognition of the full worth of work undertaken at institutions outside the home country, it would be very difficult indeed, and perhaps impossible in the short term, to obtain general acceptance/recognition at a country wide or system-wide level of the value of work undertaken at an institution in another country in the region. It was agreed therefore that the best way to achieve some progress with the introduction of effective student exchange arrangements would be to base the exchanges on bi-lateral agreements between two institutions - one in each country. It was judged that most of the factors which need to be taken into account in drawing up agreements for mutually advantageous exchanges would be best negotiated bi-laterally, but that this approach was virtually a necessity in the case of recognition of work done for credit.

It was considered that there needed to be close consultations and exchange visits between staff members from each institution being a party to a bi-lateral agreement. This would permit detailed discussions to take place about the curriculum content and academic standards in particular courses. With the benefit of such consultations, confidence could be built up about the courses in which exchange students are to be placed, to the stage where the home institutions would be prepared to accept credit towards their degrees for work successfully completed at host institutions. Similarly, where study to be undertaken at a host institution is aimed at a professional qualification, it would be necessary only to have the home and host institution agree beforehand on the value to be placed by the home institution on the program to be studied at the host institution.

It has been the judgement of those involved in planning the UMAP program that the better knowledge about courses and standards built up between partners to a bi-lateral agreement will spread gradually to other institutions and encourage them to be more willing to place greater value on qualifications offered by institutions in other countries. This process, it has been said, should make it easier to achieve system-wide and country-wide acceptance of the true worth of qualifications obtained in other countries.

It is difficult for me to judge how much validity there is to the view that the approach adopted for UMAP exchanges will facilitate national recognition of qualifications obtained in other countries. I think it very likely, however, that it would assist such recognition. The approach has certainly been the basis of many successful student exchange programs and can be judged as an effective part of the strategy adopted for increasing mobility between higher education institutions in the region. It is clearly not possible for governments to force an autonomous university to accept another institution's or organisation's judgement of the value of a qualification for entry to or credit in a course of that university.

I believe that the UMAP approach does contribute to better understanding of what happens elsewhere and, therefore, will assist in the better recognition of qualifications which is the issue of particular interest at this conference. I am happy to share the UMAP experience with the participants in these discussions.