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F R I E N D S

ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME, KEY ACTION 2
CAPACITY BUILDING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Furthering International Relations Capacities and Intercultural Engagement to Nurture
Campus Diversity and to Support Internationalisation at Home
(FRIENDS)**

7th WEBINAR
9th April 2020

MINUTES

Venue: online session at gotomeeting.com

Attendees: Representatives of the 16 project partner institutions took part in the webinar

1. Progress and ongoing activities in WP3 activities

Christina Armutlieva, FRIENDS project coordinator welcomed the webinar participants and suggested to start the meeting with the most recent updates concerning the IACD MOOC. The latter was successfully launched on Monday, 6 April and as of Thursday, 9 April already 2 units have been drip-fed. As per the IACD MOOC syllabus prepared and shared in the consortium in January 2020, starting 6 April 2020 for a period of 6 weeks in a row, the project consortium will release new MOOC content three times a week, namely on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. As of 9 April, over 6500 students had registered on the project website to join the IACD MOOC, but only slightly over 1500 among them had actually started attending it and their status in the platform's dashboard is "in progress". Currently, the partners' efforts should focus on the students who are actually learning through the IACD MOOC to ensure the highest possible success rate and completion of the IACD MOOC's initial run. Christina shared with the partners updated IACD MOOC stats from 8 April 2020 (see the table below) and encouraged everyone to work on to enhance student engagement and increase the IACD MOOC success rate over 15% that is considered a min. threshold.

FRIENDS PC HEI	Min. number of students register before 17 May 2020	Number of registered students as of 8 April 2020	Number of students who have started IACD MOOC completion as of 8 April 2020	Min. number of students to complete IACD MOOC AND to submit a relevant digital story by 17 May 2020
RTC, Bhutan	100	73	12	15
RIM, Bhutan	100	100	20	15
SRU, Cambodia	100	80	20	15
DIU, Cambodia	100	83	12	15
APU, Malaysia	100	159	11	15
BUC, Malaysia	100	136	3	15
SLU, Philippines	100	4275	874	15
UC, Philippines	100	764	245	15
CTU, Philippines	100	213	7	15
PSU, Thailand	100	65	7	15
PYU, Thailand	100	38	1	15
MSU, Thailand	100	133	3	15
TOTAL	1200	6119	1215	180

Subsequently, the project coordinator gave the floor to FRIENDS HEIs from Asia to report on the progress they are making with the second key component of WP3, namely the digital storytelling PC HEIs students are to engage with as well as the related contest to be organized and conducted at each of the 12 PC HEIs. Andy Seddon from APU informed the consortium members that at APU, they had already distributed promotional videos and detailed information on the digital storytelling activity among large numbers of students. In addition, APU project team is organizing and facilitating various distance learning seminars and online workshops to support the students involve in this activity. Ofelia Mana explained that at UC, they had created a specific Facebook page to keep in touch with students taking part in digital storytelling. Furthermore, the Digital Storytelling How-to Manual developed earlier this year in the consortium is actively promoted and distributed to UC students. Richel Lamadrid from SLU reported that students and staff are expected to return to the classrooms after 1 May 2020. Both the IACD MOOC and the digital storytelling exercise are incorporated as part of various classes delivered to SLU students with diverse profile. As a result, Richel expects to see a significant increase of the number of digital stories produced by SLU students in May. Partners at PSU are currently doing a lot of promotional work related to both key activities in WP3, namely PSU students' completion of the IACD MOOC at its initial run and the digital storytelling contest. Prasertsak Waensila from PSU is confident that the results of the orientation sessions and online dissemination will soon become visible when PSU students return to the classrooms in mid-April and start submitting their digital stories. Mike Mealem from PYU reported on having already collected 4 digital stories and more are to come over the next couple of weeks. He also reassured that partners that the indicators concerning the number of PYU students to complete the IACD MOOC upon its initial release will be reached as planned in mid-May.

2. Student Boot Camp activity in WP4

Christina explained that the Student Boot Camp to be hosted by VUM will kick-start the project activities in WP4 related to the establishment and launch of the FRIENDS Teahouses. These multicultural social hubs will be set up at the 12 PC HEIs (1 per university) as new structural units

representing one of the key FRIENDS project outcomes to sustain beyond the project lifetime. Any significant delay in completing the Student Boot Camp activity could lead to blocking the project progress. On the other hand, in view of the COVID-19 crisis, the state of emergency in Bulgaria being recently prolonged to mid-May 2020, and the general restrictions concerning numerous aspects of every-day life and services provision in Bulgaria, Christina expressed her fears and concerns over possible delays with the visa applications of the 36 students to take part in the Student Boot Camp in Bulgaria in summer 2020. In this respect, on behalf of VUM Christina suggested the postponement of the actual start of the Student Boot Camp with the 5 to 6 weeks. Starting the Student Boot Camp on 24 or 31 August 2020 instead of 20 July 2020 as originally planned, should allow time to solve possible visa issues and delays to be expected after the end of the state of emergency in Bulgaria and the removal of the current travel restrictions to Bulgaria. Also, for the time being it is unclear how long the external EU borders will remain closed for third country citizens.

Richel from SLU, Mike from PYU, Andy from APU, Ofelia Mana from UC and Sirem-orn from MSU confirmed that they fully agree with the suggestion to postpone the Student Boot Camp's start date. Richel suggested to give more than 2 new possible start dates. Christina answered that the decision to postpone the actual start should be made at consortium level and partners could vote to choose the 2 most suitable dates that meet the majority of the partners' plans. It is clear that the new dates may not match all 16 FRIENDS HEIs' academic calendars to the same extent and for sure everyone is already making compromises while adapting to the COVID-19 provoked crisis. Ayse Ozkan from IAU suggested to reduce the Student Boot Camp's planned duration of 8 weeks. Christina disagreed and clarified that this would mean a significant change of the training activity's agenda, goals and learning outcomes. The latter suggests a completely different scenario compared to the postponement of the Student Boot Camp's actual start by a couple of weeks. Christina added that the project application form describing the different activities' goals, outcomes and indicators represents an annex to the signed Grant Agreement hence any significant change to project activities' goals and outcomes is subject to prior authorization, most likely a budget revision and even a Grant Agreement change.

Therefore Christina recommended that the consortium considers only a reasonable postponement of the Student Boot Camp's start date that in light of COVID-19 seems well-substantiated and clearly justified. Partners from PSU asked if the Student Boot Camp start could be posted by one year due to PSU academic calendar. Christina answered that this would lead to stopping the project activities completely for one year, which is obviously not an option. It goes without saying that all partners have to make some sort of compromises and to look for ways to work their way around the COVID-19 crisis. If PSU partners are concerned that not many PSU students among the 15 min. to complete the IACD MOOC and to deliver a digital story by mid-May 2020 would be willing to take part in a 2-month mobility to Bulgaria, then the University should strive to extend the pool to choose from and to increase the number of students to obtain the Intercultural Passport in mid-May 2020 so that the chances of identifying the 3 most suitable Student Boot Camp participants at institutional level increase too.

Andy asked if partners could be given a couple of days to discuss internally the 2 new Student Boot Camp dates that best match APU's academic calendar. Christina agreed that this is a great idea and promised to send a doodle link with 4 Student Boot Camp possible start dates in the period of 24 August to 14 September 2020. Each of the 16 FRIENDS HEIs should vote once on behalf of the institution by identifying 2 out of 4 options that best suit their calendar. The 2 options to collect the highest number of votes will be identified as plan A and B on consortium level and will be communicated to EACEA in the project progress report to be submitted in early May 2020.

3. Project progress report

Detailed information on the progress report's content and format is available on EACEA website and Christina encouraged the partners to carefully explore it at https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/beneficiaries-space/capacity-building-in-the-field-of-higher-education_en. Furthermore, Christina reminded that partners that each partner institution in FRIENDS has access to the Progress Report content through the Funding and Tender EU Participant Portal at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>. To enter the FRIENDS project space, project partners have to use the ECAS account of the person identified by them as a project contact person in the application form submitted in February 2020. If necessary, the project coordinator could introduce changes and update this contact data in the platform. Project partners were asked to contact Christina separately in case their institution decides to change the project contact person on the Funding and Tender EU Participant Portal.

As mentioned before by Christina and confirmed by the most recent EACEA email she shared with the partners on 6 April 2020, the production of the progress report should be a joint exercise all partners in the consortium are contributing proactively to. Christina encouraged the partners to read carefully the CBHE eReport Explanatory Note on the EACEA website at:

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/750MB/cbhe_t_report_explanatory_note.pdf

She confirmed that in the course of April 2020, she would be looking forward to receive partners' inputs and contributions on various report sections such as relevance, dissemination, impact, equipment, etc. Furthermore, FRIENDS partners' proactive collaboration is required in the process of preparing the project's financial statement to be submitted as an attachment to the progress report. Due to COVID-19 lockdowns and states of emergency most FRIENDS partner institutions are currently facing, VUM had already extended the original deadline of 31 March 2020 for submitting the 2nd internal project reports supported by relevant project evidence until 24 April 2020. Since the data collected from the 15 FRIENDS HEIs by 24 April 2020 will need to be processed for the purposes of the progress report, Christina asked the partners to observe and stick to this extended deadline. As clarified in EACEA's last emailed shared with the partners on 6 April 2020, in the financial statement, the consortium members could include also costs incurred in the project, which have not been paid yet during the reporting period. In reality, this means that the staff costs claimed by the partners based on the timesheets and joint declarations they will submit to VUM by 24 April 2020, could be included in the progress report. Christina encouraged the partners to pay special attention to the elaboration of the reporting documentation by ensuring that all statements in the timesheets and the joint declarations are well grounded through actual project results achieved and relevant supporting evidence.

Karoly Kopasz from BMU asked if the requested staff costs documents could be sent without signatures and stamps or if these could be signed and stamped digitally. Christina confirmed that if the lockdowns across the FRIENDS countries continue until 24 April 2020, it is understandable that obtaining all necessary signatures and stamps could be challenge. Therefore, she suggested that until local lockdowns are in place, the partners could send the requested files unsigned. In any case, the information to be included in these documents should be final and approved by the persons to sign subsequently the hard copies. To ensure that the data sent by 24 April 2020 is approved by all persons concerned and/or in charge, Christina suggested to email the documents to friends@vumk.eu by cc-ing the respective persons. Scans of the duly signed originals should be emailed to VUM as soon as the partners return to the universities.

Finally, project partners agreed to e-meet next time on 7 May 2020, Thursday at 10 am Brussels time again at gotomeeting.com. By that time, the mutually drafted and crafted progress report should be almost or completely ready. At the upcoming webinar, the FRIENDS partners will discuss and

endorse its final version for submission. Christina thanked everyone for their time and contribution and wished Happy Easter to all partners celebrating it this week.