



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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)**

9th WEBINAR
10th June 2020

MINUTES

Venue: online session at gotomeeting.com

Attendees: Representatives of all FRIENDS HEIs

1. WP3 progress and completion

Christina Armutlieva, FRIENDS project coordinator welcomed the webinar participants. She informed them that as of 9th June 2020, RTC, SLU, UC and PSU had successfully completed and reached all WP3 indicators linked to their performance at university level as follows:

RTC		
09.06.2020		
Not started	54	41%
Between 1-25% out of 107 steps	36	27%
Between 26-50% out of 107 steps	3	2%
Between 51-75% out of 107 steps	0	0%
Between 76-99% out of 107 steps	6	5%
Completed	32	24%
Total	131	
Digital Stories Submitted	22	

SLU		
09.06.2020		
Not started	117	2%
Between 1-25% out of 107 steps	315	6%

Between 26-50% out of 107 steps	92	2%
Between 51-75% out of 107 steps	61	1%
Between 76-99% out of 107 steps	999	17%
Completed	4128	72%
Total	5712	
Digital Stories Submitted	37	

UC		
09.06.2020		
Not started	216	41%
Between 1-25% out of 107 steps	71	13%
Between 26-50% out of 107 steps	7	1%
Between 51-75% out of 107 steps	5	1%
Between 76-99% out of 107 steps	0	0%
Completed	232	44%
Total	531	
Digital Stories Submitted	242	

PSU		
09.06.2020		
Not started	98	45%
Between 1-25% out of 107 steps	62	29%
Between 26-50% out of 107 steps	5	2%
Between 51-75% out of 107 steps	5	2%
Between 76-99% out of 107 steps	5	2%
Completed	41	19%
Total	216	
Digital Stories Submitted	18	

Each of the 4 PC HEIs had submitted to VUM more than 15 digital stories and a high number of their IACD MOOC registered students had successfully completed the online course at the Intercultural Passport's piloting phase. Christina thanked the 4 best-performing PC HEIs in WP3 so far for their commitment and hard work and confirmed that the rest of the 8 PC HEIs had also made great progress since the last webinar in early May 2020. All of them are on the right track and very close to reaching their indicators.

Bill Shields from SRU expressed his concern over the slow or completely lacking internet connection outside SRU campus in Cambodia that causes IACD MOOC student learners tremendous trouble and prevents them from progressing with their IACD MOOC studies. Christina confirmed that VUM is aware of this challenge that is outside SRU control and suggested that for the time being and in order to reach the minimum indicators at Intercultural Passport's piloting stage in WP3, the SRU team unites efforts in reaching out to students staying on campus or in the town of Svay Rieng. Obviously, once the rest of the students return to campus, they will be able to complete the IACD MOOC and, hopefully, obtain also the Intercultural Passport at its exploitation phase. Andy Seddon from APU added that the FRIENDS team at his university sends regular reminders and information emails but with APU students away from campus until the end of 2020, the recruitment of new IACD MOOC

learners remains a challenge. Christina suggested for Andy and his team to rather focus at present on the 198 APU students who had already registered at the International Passport platform and to try and encourage them to complete the online course. Recruitment of new IACD MOOC learners could be resumed once all students return to campus towards the end of 2020.

As of 9th June 2020, VUM had received only 3 digital storytelling contest selection protocols, namely from RTC, UC and PSU. Christina encouraged the rest of the partners to submit their selection protocols nominating the Student Boot Camp participants as soon as the digital storytelling contest at their HEI is finalized. Richel Lamadrid from SLU explained that the SLU digital storytelling contest winners are graduating soon hence they would be unable to contribute to the FRIENDS Teahouse in Year 3 of the project lifetime. Christina clarified that in any case, these students should be thanked for their involvement and contribution to the FRIENDS project and that apart from the Intercultural Passport award, their special efforts could be recognized by presenting them with some sort of encouragement award like a FRIENDS project SWAG set. However, they are not eligible to take part in the Student Boot Camp as the latter will provide a training to students who will be in charge of the FRIENDS Teahouse setup and facilitation during the social and multicultural hub's piloting year. Richel confirmed that SLU will follow the instructions and will ensure that the fair selection and nomination of the students eligible to take part in the 8-week training mobility to VUM.

2. WP4 activities launch

Christina referred to the information on the FRIENDS Teahouses setup and the relevant equipment instalment that the project partners had provided in the Progress Report submitted to EACEA in early May 2020. She asked the partners to provide an update by specifying their FRIENDS Teahouse's exact venue, state of preparedness, equipment instalment status and use as well as the estimated deadline when the multicultural hub will be fit for purpose. It was stressed that as previously discussed all equipment purchased in the project should be already put in use. Partners from RTC and RIM confirmed that this is the case at their FRIENDS Teahouses. Andy added that most of the project equipment at APU is already being used for project purposes despite the fact that the FRIENDS Teahouse is not open yet due to COVID-19. Finally, Mike Meallem from PYU reported that the FRIENDS Teahouse venue at the university had been already identified and until PYU campus reopens, the project equipment is being used at another place in the university for the purposes of project implementation.

Apart from setting up the FRIENDS Teahouses, initial WP4 activities include the organization and facilitation of the Student Boot Camp. Christina confirmed that as of early June 2020 when the EU's international travel reopening plans are still unclear, it seems unlikely to be able to kick-start the Student Boot Camp on 25th August 2020 as discussed in the near past. In particular, the visa procedures are expected to be time-consuming hence the need to reconsider the Student Boot Camp start date. To take an informed decision at consortium level on the Student Boot Camp's most appropriate timing, Christina required that all FRIENDS partners should provide information on the country-specific international travel regulations and the limitations, if any, imposed on national level concerning face-to-face teaching and learning as of 1st July 2020. In addition, FRIENDS HEIs should share information on any university-based arrangements linked to COVID-19 pandemic that will be applicable after 1st July 2020 and that may prevent their students from taking part in a mobility to VUM for the purposes of the Student Boot Camp in the course of 2020. Once the requested data is collected, Christina will summarize it and will share it with the partners and the Project Officer at EACEA as part of the evidence justifying the reasons behind a possible new rescheduling of the Student Boot Camp. The latter will be discussed at the next consortium webinar, which would be scheduled for 10 am Brussels time on Thursday 20th August 2020. Christina confirmed that in the meantime, VUM project team remain at all partners' disposal for any questions and assistance that may be needed. Partners should use the friends@vumk.eu email address as well as other communication channels like WhatsApp and Viber to connect with VUM project team in case of ad hoc situations.

3. Upcoming project meeting in Thailand

Christina asked Mike from PYU to host the upcoming partner meeting in Thailand during the week commencing 5th October 2020 about the prospect to conduct the event as originally planned. Mike confirmed that as of early June 2020, life in Thailand seems to be more or less back to normal except for the lack of scheduled international flights until July 2020. Partners agreed to follow carefully the developments and take final decision on the meeting in Thailand at the consortium webinar planned for 20th August 2020. Christina confirmed that ideally and if possible, the partners should proceed with the original plans and hold meeting in early October 2020. However, she stressed that this is not final and no practical arrangements and tickets purchases should be done before the 20th August 2020.

Ayse Ozkan from IAU reported on an online meeting she had taken part in where ongoing Erasmus+ projects implementation and possible prolongation was discussed due to COVID-19. Ayse also suggested that the FRIENDS project eligibility period may be extended by 6 months. Christina confirmed that if duly justified, there is indeed an option to ask for prior authorization from EACEA to extend the project implementation period by max. 12 months. In fact, this would be a formal request to introduce changes to the Grant Agreement hence the need to consider in advance all pros and cons and to provide a detailed justification and reasoning. Christina recommended that at this point the partnership should do its best to continue implementing the project activities as originally planned. In the course of Year 3 of FRIENDS implementation, it will become evident if additional time to complete the project deliverables and indicators is needed in light of COVID-19's hindsight.

4. Financial reporting

Christina shared with the partners a file prepared by the FRIENDS project financial manager with updated information on the project evidence and documentation received by VUM so far. VUM has added to the project files the complete documentation collected from all FRIENDS HEIs for costs incurred and claimed in the period of 15th November 2018 to 14th October 2019. Furthermore, apart from SLU and CTU, all other FRIENDS HEIs had submitted the reporting documentation for the period of 15th October 2019 to 14th March 2020. Christina reminded the partners that the next batch of project reporting documentation should be submitted to VUM until 30th October 2020 for all costs incurred between 15th March 2020 and 14th October 2020. Christina also informed the partners on the costs claimed by the 16 partner HEIs as of 9th June 2020 (in total 374 629,02 EUR) and the advance payments processed to the FRIENDS HEIs (in total 402 931,49 EUR incl. payments processed by VUM). The 1st pre-financing from EACEA to the project consortium made to VUM bank account amounts to 499 813,00 EUR. The 2nd pre-financing is subject to approval of the project's Progress Report submitted on 8th May 2020 and will amount to 40% of the total estimated project grant hence to 399 850,40 EUR. VUM will share within the partnership any feedback to be received by EACEA concerning the submitted Progress Report and will inform the consortium members as soon as the 2nd pre-financing is transferred.