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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)**

11th WEBINAR
17th December 2020

MINUTES

Venue: online session via zoom.us

Attendees: Representatives of all FRIENDS HEIs with the exception of APU and PYU

1. Year 2 Progress Report

Christina Armutlieva, FRIENDS project coordinator welcomed the participants in the final project webinar of Year 2020 that has been underpinned through unprecedented challenges in the project and beyond. Nevertheless, looking back at the concluded 25 months of the project lifetime, the partners can report on having already successfully achieved 3 of the 5 specific project objectives. In addition, during Year 2 of the project lifetime work towards achievement of the fourth specific objective, namely to transform PC HEIs' International Relations Offices (IROs) into vibrant multicultural focal points through the establishment of FRIENDS Teahouses and the induction of Home away from Home Programme for integrated international student care, has also begun. All 12 PC HEIs have physically established and formally institutionalized their FRIENDS Teahouses, incl. through the new structural units' integration into the HEIs' organizational charts. The Year 2 Progress Report is published on the project website under About FRIENDS/ Management and Quality subsection. Apart from outlining the progress made concerning major project milestones that mark significant developments and key momentums in the project, the Year 2 Progress Report contains a summary of the estimated costs claimed by the partners for the period of 15.11.2018 - 31.10.2020 based on project evidence provided to VUM as of 15.12.2020. So far, approx. 36% of the staff costs budget estimated at the grant allocation phase has been used and 40% of the total allocated grant has been paid out. The remaining funding will be used to conduct activities and produce outcomes to ensure that all 5 project specific objectives are met until the end of the project. Concerning the travel costs and costs of stay related to the force majeure cancellation of the scheduled 4th partner meeting in March 2020 in Hungary due to COVID-19 outbreak, Christina reminded the partners to follow the instructions of EACEA previously shared with them, incl. EACEA's message sent on 08.12.2020. She

also encouraged the partners to cooperate proactively with Desislava Sariyska, VUM project team member concerning any financial matters in the project. On 20.11.2020, the project coordinating institution submitted a request to EACEA to prolong the project duration by 12 months. Christina assured the partners that she will inform them on EACEA's decision as soon VUM receives news about it.

2. Upcoming project activities

During the remaining project lifetime, the partners shall combine efforts to complete the activities in WP4, WP5, WP6, WP7 and WP8. Between January and June 2021, in WP4 each of the 12 PC HEIs will have to draft and adopt a detailed calendar of their FRIENDS Teahouse's social and cultural activities (del. 4.4.). Furthermore, arrangements and plans for the organization and facilitation of the FRIENDS International and Intercultural Festivals (del. 4.5.) should be made. The Home Away From Home Programme (del. 4.3.) designed earlier in the project should be adapted and endorsed at institutional level to ensure its implementation through the established FRIENDS Teahouse units. Finally, the Student Boot Camp in WP4 (del. 4.1.) will be organized when international travels resume and student and staff mobilities become possible again.

During the first 6 months of 2021, the project partners will have to organize and hold the Interim Card Report Days activity (5.3.) whose results will feed into the Interim Internal Evaluation Report (del. 5.4.) due in June 2021 at the latest. Christina suggested to hold a specific project quality related webinar in February 2021 to discuss the planning and facilitation of the Interim Card Report Days.

In WP6 in 2021, project partners will have to start working proactively with external stakeholders and target audiences for the purposes of project results' exploitation and multiplication. In particular, project partners in Asia will have to reach out to students and faculty of other universities in their countries, which are not members of the FRIENDS consortium to promote to them the Intercultural Passport virtual module and the FRIENDS Teahouses' activities (del. 6.1. FRIENDS Caravans). Furthermore, PC HEIs are expected to promote students' improved global skills and intercultural competence to local and national employers and companies (del. 6.3. Career Fairs Local Markets for Global Talents). Exploitation of knowledge and expertise in the field of IaH will be conducted through PC HEIs' interaction and collaborations with higher education practitioners and policy makers in the 5 Asian countries involved (del. 6.2. FRIENDS National Conferences on IaH). Finally, cooperation with representatives of the non-governmental sector and local ethnic and cultural minorities is to be fostered through the development, endorsement and implementation of the 12 PC HEIs' Community Development Plans (del. 6.4.).

3. Q&A

Bill Shields from SRU asked if travels within Cambodia for the purposes of project promotion outside the city of the HEI's registration could be funded through the allocated grant. Christina answered that only mobilities listed in the excel sheet with the approved project budget could be funded. In general, activities linked to dissemination are expected to be funded by the partner universities through the means of co-funding. As discussed many times in the project, each of the 16 partner institutions is expected to co-fund part of the costs to incur with respect to project activities implementation. Provided SRU insists on funding mobilities not listed in the approved project budget, a detailed and justified request for prior authorization should be drafted by SRU. The request should include detailed description of the activities to be completed, estimated costs to incur and clarification why these dissemination costs should be funded through the project and not co-funding. The project coordinator will forward the request of SRU to EACEA and only after and if an approval is granted, the respective unit costs could be claimed for reimbursement in the project.

Finally, project partners from Bhutan, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Turkey shared their current experiences with COVID-19 related restrictions and challenges faced in their countries. Christina thanked all the partners for their proactive work and cooperation in FRIENDS during this extraordinary year. Everyone present expressed hopes and extended best wishes for a healthy and successful 2021.