Background Note

The ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC)

The 1st ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC1) was launched in October 2008 (Berlin, Germany) as a stakeholder response to the 1st Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME 1) for strengthened education co-operation among ASEM countries. ASEF, as the civil society outreach of the ASEM and interface between the civil society and ASEM governments, organised the ARC1 together with its partners.1 It was designed to complement the governmental efforts, communicate the opinions and priorities of the university community in both regions and ensure the contributions of the higher education sector to the ministerial meetings.

In May 2009 (Hanoi, Vietnam), the ARC was acknowledged as the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Ministers for Education representing the higher education stakeholders and ASEF was designated as its Permanent Secretariat2. The 2nd ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC2) in 20103 saw the increased engagement of the ASEM higher education community. More countries participated and the Conference recommendations reflected the direct contributions from the Rectors through the establishment of the ARC Advisory Group. In addition, two student representatives had the opportunity to interact with the university rectors. These developments resulted in further recognition and support to the stakeholder process.

The 3rd Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME3, 9-10 May 2011, Copenhagen, Denmark) “recognised the need to involve stakeholders through the ASEM Rectors’ Conference... in the ASEM Education Process to achieve a broad consensus on the aims and measures of the Process, and acknowledged the recommendations from the 2nd ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC2)”.

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1 1st ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC1) Partners: ASEAN University Network (AUN), European University Association (EUA), the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) and the Free University of Berlin
2 Page 1-2, Chair’s Conclusions, 2nd Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME2), 14-15 May 2009, Hanoi, Vietnam
3 The 2nd ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC2) themed Asia-Europe University Co-operation: Contributing to the Global Knowledge Society was convened on 26-27 October 2010, Seoul, Korea
3rd ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC3)
25-26 September 2012

Education lies at the heart of economic growth and development. This is captured in the Europe 2020 strategy adopted by the European Commission in June 2010 to revive the economy of the European Union. In parallel, education is reflected in policies and strategies of ASEM member countries in Asia, such as the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009-2015). In times of economic crisis and quickly rising student numbers, however, not only do countries need to improve access to education; they also need to develop the right type of skills and research to be more competitive, and to ensure sustainable growth. Unemployment rates, job mismatch and wage differentials are some signs of a disparity between required skills and educational programmes offered.

The role of universities as motors for economic growth had already been underlined by the ARC2, through stimulating entrepreneurship, more incubators for graduates, and bringing talent from underrepresented groups into higher education. In order to meet these objectives, higher education community must work closely with all stakeholders involved.

Since 2008, the ASEM education dialogue has provided impetus for a discourse on university-business co-operation. The 1st Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME1; May 2008, Germany) stated that “close co-operation between education and industry at international, national, regional and local levels is a core element for ensuring the employability of the young generation entering the workforce as well as of older generations”1. At the 3rd Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for

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1 Chair’s Conclusions of the 1st Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME1) (May 2008, Germany)
Education (ASEMME3) in 2011 in Denmark, the Education Ministers “invited ASEF through the ASEM Rectors’ Conference to... enhance the dialogue on higher education-business co-operation between stakeholders”\(^2\).

In June 2011, participants at the 2\(^{nd}\) Asia-Europe Education Workshop\(^3\), co-organised by ASEF and the University of Innsbruck (UI), agreed that the current debates on the role of universities should not be detached from societal developments. Moreover, it was recommended that exchange, co-operation and promotion of the Universities’ Social Responsibility (USR) agenda be continued within the ASEM education community.

The 3\(^{rd}\) edition of the ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC3) held in the Netherlands on 25-26 September 2012 was organised by ASEF in partnership with the University of Groningen (RUG) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN). Its programme was built on the results of the ARC2 and informed by the priorities laid out in the ASEMME3 Chair’s Conclusions\(^4\) as well as trends and developments in higher education.

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\(^2\) Chair’s Conclusions of the 3\(^{rd}\) Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME3) (May 2011, Denmark)

\(^3\) 2\(^{nd}\) Asia-Europe Education Workshop, Knowledge Societies: Universities and their Social Responsibilities (June 2011, Austria)

\(^4\) The ASEMME3 Chair’s Conclusions highlighted four topics: Quality Assurance and Recognition, Engaging Business and Industry in Education, Balanced Mobility and Lifelong Learning (LLL) including Vocational Education and Training (VET)
Launch of the Asia-Europe Students’ Forum

24 September 2012

The plea to hear the voice of students in the framework of the ARC was taken seriously by the organising partners from the very beginning - student involvement was part of the first two editions of the ARC.

At ASEMME3, the Education Ministers recognised the need to integrate student participation into the ASEM Education Process. In response, ASEF launched the Asia-Europe Students’ Forum back-to-back with the ARC3.

The inaugural Forum gathered students’ perspectives on the topic Are You Fit for the Future?, which were presented by selected students at the ARC3 plenary, and will also be brought to the attention of the Ministers at ASEMME4 (May 2013, Malaysia).

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5 The ASEMME3 Chair’s Conclusions highlighted four topics: Quality Assurance and Recognition, Engaging Business and Industry in Education, Balanced Mobility and Lifelong Learning (LLL) including Vocational Education and Training (VET)
I. Introduction

The 3rd ASEM Rectors’ Conference (ARC3) took place at the University of Groningen on 25-26 September 2012. It gathered over 130 university leaders and representatives of ASEM higher education institutions, networks and organisations as well as students and representatives from industry.

Building on the results of the ARC1 and the ARC2, as well as on the conclusions of the 3rd Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME3) (May 2011, Denmark), the ARC3 was jointly organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and the University of Groningen (RUG).

Furthermore, ASEF launched the Asia-Europe Students’ Forum as a direct response to the recommendations made at the ARC2 and ASEMME3. The 1st edition of this one-day Forum, which took place on 24 September 2012, was an integral part of the ARC3. It was attended by 46 student representatives from 36 ASEM countries.

Participants of the Students’ Forum themed Are you Fit for the Future? conducted a reality-check by tackling the following questions: What are students’ expectations of working life after graduation? What are the experiences of graduates? How does university education contribute to skills learning? Which skills really matter? And what is and should be the role of stakeholders outside the university?

Welcome remarks and keynotes speeches at the ARC3 were delivered by Prof. Dr Sibrandes Poppema (President of RUG), Mr Karsten Warnecke (Deputy Executive Director of ASEF), Prof. Piniti Ratamanukul (on behalf of the AUN Board of Trustees), H.E. Drs. Halbe Zijlstra (Dutch Secretary of State for Higher Education) and Mr Roelof Joosten (Member of the Executive Board, Royal Friesland Campina N.V., the Netherlands).

1 Hosted by the Free University of Berlin (October 2008, Germany)
2 Hosted by Korea University (KU) (October 2010, Korea)
For the 1st Asia-Europe Students’ Forum, welcome remarks were given by Mr Warnecke (ASEF), Prof. Poppema (RUG), and Dr Choltis Dhirathiti (Deputy Executive Director of AUN). A keynote speech was delivered by Drs Gertjan Lankhorst (CEO, Gasterra BV, the Netherlands).

The importance and the timeliness of the topic *Universities, Businesses and You: For a Sustainable Future* were highlighted throughout the Conference. The plenary discussions focused on (1) trends and challenges in higher education, (2) the framework for university-business-community co-operation in ASEM, as well as (3) the challenges of employability and social responsibility in the future.

*Specific issues were addressed in parallel working groups, which comprised a stock-taking of models of university-business co-operation and the role of universities in providing education for the workplace and for life.*

University Social Responsibility (USR) towards the engagement of communities and stakeholders was also tackled, as well as the dilemma between excellence in and widening access to higher education. Summaries of the discussions are included as key statements in the *Working Groups* section.

Both the recommendations of the ARC3 and the contributions from the 1st Asia-Europe Students’ Forum, which were presented by selected students at the plenary, will be presented to the Ministers at the 4th Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME4).

**II. Networking Opportunities**

**Academic Speed Dating**

The ARC3 participants were provided interactive badges pre-programmed according to their respective profiles and interests. Each interest was colour coded. When two participants with the same interest came close to each other, the badges lit up in the same colour and alarmed.

**Rectors’ and Students’ Meet and Greet**

During this segment, university leaders had the opportunity to interact with students from their respective countries. Majority of the students who attended the activity came from the University of Groningen’s pool of international students. They were joined by selected participants from the 1st Asia-Europe Students’ Forum.
III. Working Groups

Working Group 1:
“University-Business Co-operation: Where Are We?”

Working Group 1A

Chair:
Prof. Dr Edilberto de Jesus
Faculty Emeritus, Asian Institute of Management (AIM), the Philippines

Speakers:
Prof. John Hearn
Vice-President (International), The University of Sydney, Australia and Chief Executive, The Worldwide Universities Network (WUN)

Ms Nannette Ripmeester
Founder and Director, Expertise in Labour Mobility (ELM), the Netherlands

Ms Myriam Abboud
Ph.D Candidate, The University of Sydney, Australia

Mr Marcin Falys
Rector, University of Warsaw, Poland

Rapporteur:
Assoc. Prof. Dr Azman Ahmad
Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Education), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), Brunei Darussalam

Key Statements:

- Today, in spite of — or possibly because of — the global crisis, universities and businesses need to work more strongly in alliance, to address global challenges. They can do so by jointly developing research programmes, by co-designing educational and entrepreneurship programmes for tomorrow’s decision-makers and other stakeholders, and by reaching out to society at large. University reforms should therefore consider the opportunities in linking with businesses and industries.

- Successful University-Business Co-operation (UBC) — based on trust, transparency and common (ethical) values — will stimulate innovation and contribute to a strong, creative, flexible and happy workforce, a sound labour market and a more sustainable world.

- In bringing stakeholders together, it is crucial to manage expectations. UBC is not only about helping students to find employment, it also gives them the tools, confidence and self-assurance to understand the world, take responsibility and create a better, sustainable world.
Working Group 1B

Chair:
Prof. Ulrike Beisiegel
Rector, University of Göttingen, Germany

Speakers:
Prof. Freddy Boey
Provost, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore

Ms Uyen Phuong Nguyen
Managing Director, Institute of Potential Leaders (IPL), Vietnam

Prof. Lauritz B Holm-Nielsen
Rector, Aarhus University (AU), Denmark

Mr Arjen Hoekstra
University of Groningen (RUG), the Netherlands

Rapporteur:
Prof. Chris Brink
Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle, United Kingdom

Key Statements:

- A useful way to foster creative skills and entrepreneurship in education is to use entrepreneurial experience from staff as well as students. Tapping their experience more systematically will have a greenhouse effect on student talent development.

- When striving for excellence, also in co-operation with businesses, the diversity of excellence should be considered. Excellence should, among others, be addressed in both horizontal and vertical terms.

A number of case studies of excellence in UBC and structural co-operation with industry, were shared in this working group, among them:

- The Rise Up Entrepreneurship Programme (RUEP) (Newcastle University, United Kingdom), which is a specific university training initiative in entrepreneurship for students;

- The Graduate Employment Training Unit (UGet) (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)). UKM is in the advanced stage of setting up the UGet, which focuses on soft-skills training and other work place required competencies which can be discipline-based. The curriculum and delivery will be worked on by industry, NGOs and government agency partners.

3 www.ncl.ac.uk/careers; See the ARC3 Recommendations
4 See the ARC3 Recommendations
Working Group 2
“Education for the Workplace; Education for Life?”

Working Group 2A

Chair:
Asst. Prof. Surakit Nathisuwan
Vice-President for International Relations,
Mahidol University, Thailand

Speakers:
Dr Alfredo E. Fascual
President, University of the Philippines (UP)

Dr Chito Salazar
Founding President, Philippine Business for Education (PBEd), the Philippines

Prof. Dr Thomas Ffeiffer
Vice-Rector, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität
Heidelberg, Germany

Ms Vicki Baars
Vice-President, National Union of Students (NUS), United Kingdom

Rapporteur:
Prof. Vasile Işan
Rector, Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza,
Romania

Key Statement:

- In its education mission, universities should be guided not only by the challenge of employability of graduates, but foremost by the objective of educating responsible global citizens who are able to adapt to challenges.

Four main views on the topic were expressed:

- Role of higher education as specialised education to enhance employability;

- Re-adaptation models of universities to cater for non-traditional learners and to provide alternative access routes to higher education (lifelong learning);

- University services to empower marginalised groups and contribute to community development and progress through research;

- Universities to equip students with competitive knowledge and the “right” skills.
Working Group 2B

Chair:

Prof. Dr Luc François
Chief International Officer, Ghent University, Belgium

Speakers:

Prof. Shen Wei
Associate Dean for China and Associate Professor of International Affairs, Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Commerciales d’Angers (ESSCA) School of Management, France

Dr Martin Hallik
Vice-Rector, University of Tartu (UT), Estonia

Prof. Im Jung Gi
Vice-President, Seoul National University (SNU), Korea

Mr Soh Yi Da
Student, National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore

Rapporteur:

Prof. Ahmad Shukri Mustapa Kamal
Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Academic & International Affairs, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia

Key Statements:

- Equipping students with the right set of skills include experiential learning, e.g. through global volunteering programmes and community development programmes.

- Mobility, via international study exchanges, work placements and community development programmes, was emphasised as an important tool for the experiential learning of skills. Universities should therefore work closely with governments and other stakeholders to overcome the challenges posed by visa regulations, funding, information gaps and language.

- Lifelong learning and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are two key aspects that higher education institutions nowadays should address as part of their mission. This includes giving access to non-traditional groups of learners and the recognition of prior learning, as well as the conceptualisation of all educational programmes as yielding lifelong benefits and instilling morals and values in all graduates.

The working group discussions revolved around the challenge of graduate unemployment and about ways to equip students with competitive knowledge and the right set of skills, going beyond employability to create value for society at large.
Working Group 3
“Maximising Impact: Community, Stakeholder Engagement and University Social Responsibility (USR)”

Working Group 3A

Chair:
Prof. Dr Xiao Xian
Vice-President, Yunnan University, China

Speakers:
Prof. Iwan Dwiprahasto
Vice-Rector for Academic and Student Affairs, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Indonesia

Prof. Koen Lamberts
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick, United Kingdom

Mr David Garrahy
Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, European Youth Forum (YFJ)

Ms Maria Tsakalerou
Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH), Greece

Rapporteur:
Prof. Elmer Sterken
Rector Magnificus, University of Groningen (RUG), the Netherlands

Key Statements:

- A holistic understanding of USR implies that universities will acknowledge societal development, respect integrity and act as local anchors of social and economic activities.

- USR should be an intrinsic part of each university’s mission statement, of its management, its research and its training components. It includes but is not limited to:
  - Training students to be responsible citizens, e.g. by supporting student volunteering and social engagement through the awarding of credits;
  - Employing responsible academic and administrative staff;
  - Listening to and engaging with community and industry partners;
  - Acting as local anchors of social and economic activity;
  - Providing empowerment programmes for marginalised groups of society.

A number of good examples of University Social Responsibility (USR) initiatives were shared in this working group, among them:
- Universitas Gadjah Mada’s (UGM) Community Service Programme, which is compulsory for 4th-year students and also open to international students;
- University of Warwick’s Volunteer Programme, which reaches out to high schools in the region as well as internationally to Africa.
Working Group 3B

Chair:
Dr Gita Revalde
Vice-Rector, Riga Technical University (RTU), Latvia

Speakers:
Prof. Dato’ Dr Saran Kaur Gill
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Industry & Community Partnerships), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)

Dr Sukich Udindu
Vice-President, Corporate Social Responsibility, Minor Food Group, Thailand

Prof. Carla Locatelli
Vice-President, University of Trento, Italy

Prof. Yang Libin
Harbin Medical University (HMU), China

Rapporteur:
Fr. Jose Cruz, SJ
Vice-President, Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), the Philippines

Key Statements:

• While there is a diverse understanding of the term “University Social Responsibility”, there seems to be agreement on the fact that engaging the community and other stakeholders as part of the social responsibility of universities poses a number of theoretical and practical challenges. Foremost, it is a choice for an articulated social purpose.

• Examples of community and stakeholder engagement at various levels showed that USR must be anchored in the institutional mindset of the university to be successful. USR should interweave all fields of university activity. It is about attitudes of universities towards society at large.

• There is a necessity to inform society and governments more actively about USR as an important part of university activities.

• A holistic understanding of USR should include a critical reflection on the downsides of prosperity.
Working Group 4
“The Imperative for Excellence and the Issue of Equal Access”

Working Group 4A

Chair:
Prof. Dr Le Quanh Minh
Vice-President International Relations,
Vietnam National University (VNU)

Speakers:
Prof. Dr Akhmaloka
Rector, Institute Teknologi Bandung (ITB),
Indonesia

Dr Timothy O’Shea
Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of
Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Rapporteur:
Prof. Maurits van Rooijen
Rector Magnificus, Nyenrode Business
Universiteit, the Netherlands

Dr Ingo Cahm
Head of Strategy and Research
Development, Deutsche Telekom AG, Bonn,
Germany

Mr Florian Kaiser
Executive Committee, European Students’
Union (ESU)

Key Statements:

• Equal access to higher education is often wrongly understood as a form of competition that compromises excellence. Universities need to overcome this misconception and recognise and convey the message to policy-makers and the public at large that in fact, equal access does not lower the standard of education.

• The diversity of the student body should be considered as the key for excellence, and ability should be considered in a broader context than examination scores. Allowing talent from under-represented groups to enter education will allow universities and societies at large to tap their potential to the fullest.

• Education has to be seen as a lifelong pipeline. Equal access to all levels of education and transition from one level to the next should be the norm and universities should be proactive about achieving this.

• The challenges that universities need to tackle together with all stakeholders are: financing, selection and admission. Access can only be really effective if we fully engage employers as crucial stakeholders.
Working Group 4B

Chair:

**Br. Ricardo P. Laguda**  
FSC President, De La Salle University  
(DLSU), the Philippines

Speakers:

**Dr Kua Wongboonsin**  
Vice-President, Chulalongkorn University,  
Thailand

**Mr Michael Keane**  
Senior Partner, K2S Advisors, United  
Kingdom

**Dr Monika Schäfer-Korting**  
Executive Vice-President, Free University of  
Berlin, Germany

**Ms Naeun Choi**  
Seoul National University (SNU), Korea

Rapporteur:

**Prof. Arnoud De Meyer**  
President, Singapore Management  
University (SMU), Singapore

Key Statements:

- The trade-off between access and excellence poses a challenge to universities. Widening access can lead to an inflation of degrees and raises the question of the affordability of broadening access.

- “Excellence” should consider, but not be limited to, the needs of the labour market, such as soft skills development, language, intercultural skills, etc.

- The modern understanding of access needs to take the perspective of lifelong learning: alternative ways of delivery, the differentiation of the student body (also in terms of age and the recognition of prior learning), continuing education, professional qualifications, creativity in admission processes, etc., all of these need to be taken into consideration.

- Co-operation with businesses in the modern understanding of access to higher education is important, particularly with regard to professional qualifications, the recognition of prior learning and continuing education.