1. WHAT IS THE ASIA-LINK PROGRAMME?

The Asia-Link Programme is a new initiative by the European Commission to promote regional and multilateral networking between higher education institutions in EU Member States and South Asia, South-East Asia and China. The programme aims to promote the creation of new partnerships, reinforce existing partnerships between European and Asian universities, and create new sustainable links.

The programme builds on a series of initiatives already undertaken by the European Commission to increase mutual understanding between EU Member States and Asian countries/territories. The European Commission’s priorities for the development of economic co-operation with Asia, and its aim to establish an overall strategic framework for EU-Asian relations over the coming decade, are outlined in the Communication “Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships” (adopted in September 2001). A key requirement is the need for reciprocal understanding and to strengthen the mutual awareness of European and Asian cultural perspectives through enhanced co-operation in the higher education sector.

The Asia-Link Programme thus aims to promote co-operation in the field of higher education between EU Member States and South Asia, South-East Asia and China; and to serve as a framework for a broad range of activities aimed towards promoting mutual awareness and understanding, exchanges and economic co-operation between the two regions. It responds to needs identified by higher education institutions themselves, and as such has a “bottom-up” approach.

Asia-Link is not an open scholarship scheme, but an instrument for the support of organized, targeted and sustainable co-operative projects endorsed by the participating institutions. Asia-Link does not fund scholarships and individual researchers applying independently or outside the framework of accepted projects.
Asia-Link is not a programme for educational development aid, but for co-operation between institutions of higher education. Such co-operation is expected to produce positive effects on participating institutions and systems and may thus contribute to their development.

A total budget of €40 million has been allocated to fund the programme over a five-year period, valid until the end of 2005. Projects are financed on the basis of shared costs.

A meeting of programme “stakeholders”, namely European and Asian associations of universities, (higher) education ministries, academic exchange agencies, etc, is held annually to review programme progress. The first meeting is foreseen to take place at the end of 2002.

Asia-Link provides for two different types of support: grant support (cf. section 3) and information support (cf. section 4).

2. ELIGIBLE COUNTRIES/TERritoRIES

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* Afghanistan is currently “suspended”.
3. GRANT SUPPORT

The available EC budget for grant support is €30.250.000. This component is implemented through “Calls for Proposals”, meaning that first an announcement is published in the Official Journal and on the Internet, stating the availability of funding through this programme, and inviting interested parties to apply for support.

The first Call for Proposals (maximum EC budget: €15 million) is foreseen to take place at the end of February 2002, with a first deadline for the receipt of grant applications at the end of May 2002 and a second deadline at the end of October 2002. It is anticipated that a second Call for Proposals will take place in January 2003, with a first deadline for the receipt of grant applications at the end of April 2003 and a second deadline at the end of September 2003; and that a third Call for Proposals will take place in January 2004, with a single deadline in April 2004.

MORE SPECIFICALLY...

Grants are provided to:

- upgrade and enhance the skills of students, teaching staff and administrators of higher education institutions through the provision of in-country and overseas training;
- promote the exchange of experience and encourage mutual appreciation of study programmes and reciprocal access to higher education;
- raise awareness of opportunities in the sector and develop links that can ultimately lead to mutually beneficial economic co-operation.

Grant support may be offered in the following three areas:

- Human Resource Development
- Curriculum Development
- Institutional and Systems Development
3.1. Who is Eligible?

Eligible applicants are non-profit-making higher education institutions (or parts of such institutions) with their headquarters in European Union Member States or in any of the eligible Asian countries/territories. Applicants must act in consortium with partner organizations.

As a minimum requirement, consortia must involve at least three partner organizations, which shall be higher education institutions from at least 2 different European Union Member States and 1 Asian country/territory.

A higher education institution is defined as an institution which:

- provides courses at the undergraduate and/or graduate level of higher education leading to a recognized qualification in its own country; and may be called a “University” or bear some other relevant name (e.g., “Polytechnic”, “College”, “Institute”, or similar); and
- is recognized and its degrees accredited by the competent national authority in its own country.

Private higher education institutions that have been registered for a minimum period of five years are eligible for support. (Institutions preparing students for foreign degrees - for example those operating as a branch or under a franchising agreement - are not eligible for support.)

Asia-Link is also open to:

- established networks of higher education institutions within the area covered by the programme;
- regional institutions of higher education not belonging to any national system but formally recognized by one of the eligible countries.

Applications from consortia involving partners from the least developed countries/territories and/or from regions with fewer traditional links are particularly welcome; as are applications involving more than the minimum three members. This does not mean that large consortia are seen as preferable to smaller ones: the optimum size of a consortium is one allowing for the achievement of project objectives in the most cost-effective manner.
It may happen that a consortium involves more than one institution coming from the same country. If this is the case, the number of institutions from different eligible countries within the consortium should be greater than the number of institutions from the same eligible country.

Partner institutions must satisfy the same eligibility criteria as the applicants.

External partners may be involved in a project on the condition that they provide effective support and are aware that they will not benefit from the Community funding. Such associated partners could be: governmental departments or agencies; relevant commercial organizations, such as individual industrial companies, banks, chambers of commerce; non-governmental organizations, think-tanks, associations; foundations, charities, etc.

Higher education institutions from Singapore can participate in projects only as associated partners.

**Size of grants and complementary funding**

Grants of €200,000 (minimum) to €300,000 (maximum) shall be awarded. A grant may not exceed 75% of the total eligible project costs.

Grants of up to 90% of the total eligible costs may be awarded for project proposals involving, on the Asian side, higher education institutions that are exclusively from the least developed Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Maldives and Nepal. There is no restriction concerning the total eligible project costs. The remaining project costs shall be covered by the project partners.

**Project duration**

- Human Resource Development – minimum 12 months, maximum 36 months
- Curriculum Development – minimum 12 months, maximum 36 months
- Institutional and Systems Development – minimum 6 months, maximum 36 months.
3.2. What Types of Project are Supported?

There are three different areas of grant support:

A. HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Grants are awarded for co-operation projects that aim to upgrade the skills of university teaching staff, in particular young faculty staff and future teachers (ie postgraduate students), and administrators. Each project, which should aim to promote mobility for both Europeans and Asians, takes the form of a human resource development programme, and can include such elements as:

- short teaching/training missions in Europe/Asia, especially those which combine lecturership or training with activities such as seminars, research collaboration, thesis supervision, outreach conferences, or joint work with local staff;
- short intensive overseas programmes to permit the attendance of relevant intensive courses (for example, summer courses) or seminars/workshops, the gathering of teaching/research material and the preparation/development of actions for other programme components leading to longer-term partnerships;
- study/research abroad mainly in the form of “split” or “sandwich” programmes at the PhD and Master's level;
- internships when integrated within a structured co-operation between universities and industries.

Undergraduate students shall not be considered for mobility grants.

B. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Grants are awarded for co-operative projects that aim to develop curricula, producing new/improved courses, modules or teaching/training materials. Each project, which should be innovative, covers activities relating to the preparation of curricula and course material (content definition, teaching tools, production/printing of course material), their dissemination and the training of professors/tutors to teach them. Projects can focus on:

- multidisciplinary curricula leading to qualifications in demand on the labour markets;
- courses based on common or co-ordinated modules at different institutions;
• modules/courses with a regional (European, Asian or Asia-Europe) dimension, including those concerning contemporary Asian studies in Europe and European Union studies in Asia relevant to the future development of economic relations between the two regions;
• curricula integrating aspects of university-industry relations;
• open, Internet, and distance education.

Curriculum development projects may concern the undergraduate as well as the graduate level. They will be based on the sharing of know-how and the pooling of resources. They are expected to plan for the integration of jointly developed courses/material into the academic structure of participating institutions, and for their broader dissemination.

C. INSTITUTIONAL AND SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

Grants are awarded for co-operation projects that aim to enhance the overall management of higher education institutions through the sharing of know-how between Asia and European institutions (or groups/associations of institutions). Each project has a duration of at least six months and includes elements such as:

• joint seminars/workshops on issues like institutional autonomy, internal management of universities, distance education management, comparative internationalization policies, strengthening of university-industry relations, organized outreach to the local community, etc;
• training of senior university officials or international officers;
• cross-auditing (peer reviews) of whole institutions, administrative or academic units, curricula, procedures, etc;
• pilot initiatives centred on credit transfer, quality standards and degree recognition.

Priority will be given to projects related to the following areas:

• economic development (economics, management, technology, engineering, science, health, etc) and to specific economic sectors (ie agriculture, tourism, etc);
• development of economic co-operation such as international relations, regional integration, conflict resolution, public policy,
business law and taxation, sustainable development, business ethics, environmental sciences, etc;
• contemporary European and Asian studies, European integration, Asian development, Europe-Asia relations, etc;
• social and cultural development.

Other subject areas are, however, not prevented from participating, eg as a component of multidisciplinary projects, provided that applicants can demonstrate their relevance to the overall objectives of Asia-Link.

3.3. Who will Benefit?
Direct beneficiaries are post-graduate students, tutors/professors, principals, administrators, and educational practitioners in Europe and in South and South-East Asia, and China. Direct beneficiaries also include the higher education institutions and the academic community, whose international activities and collaborative arrangements will be established or strengthened. The programme ultimately aims to benefit the students themselves, whose choices and opportunities in terms of higher education are increased, and whose mobility is enhanced.

3.4. Expected Results
Grants shall be awarded for the implementation of co-operative projects proposed by groupings of at least two EU (from different Member States) and one Asian institutions of higher education or associations of these. Therefore, a minimum of 300 higher education institutions are expected to be involved in the programme, and assuming that each project will involve more than the three requested partners, the programme could involve a number of higher education institutions close to 1000.

3.5. How to Apply
a) Familiarize yourself with the Asia-Link Programme
Consult the programme website, and read the programme Guidelines for Applicants, which shall be published at the same time as the Call for Proposals.
b) Ensure you are eligible to submit a project

The programme is open to higher education institutions (or parts of such institutions); established networks of higher education institutions within the area covered by the programme; and regional institutions of higher education not belonging to any national system but formally recognized by one of the eligible countries.

c) Ensure there are at least three partners to develop a project

Each partner should contribute to the design and implementation of the project, providing facilities, human resources, skills and expertise, experience or similar inputs. Please ensure that there is a minimum of three partner organizations in your proposal, which shall be higher education institutions from at least 2 different European Union Member States and 1 Asian country/territory.

d) Select one area of support

Choose from the three given areas:

- human resource development
- curriculum development
- institutional and systems development

Project proposals must indicate only one component, but activities may be cross-cutting with other components.

e) Prepare a project proposal with budget

The project proposal must comply with the official EC format for presentation. Guidelines and application material for submitting a proposal will be made available on the programme website once the programme has been launched. Please follow them carefully.

f) Submit your proposal

A Call for Proposals will be announced in the Official Journal of the European Communities (http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/oj/index.html), on the Asia-Link website, and in selected publications. Following instructions published in the Call, submit your project proposal by registered post, hand delivery or courier service to the given address.
g) Selection procedure

Successful projects are selected following an open Call for Proposals. Proposals are screened for administrative compliance, then assessed on both a technical and a financial basis according to published evaluation criteria. Further details will be made available on the programme website in due course.

h) Enquiries

Questions may be sent by e-mail or by fax to the addresses listed below, indicating clearly the reference of the Call for Proposals.

**E-mail:** europeaid-asia-link@cec.eu.int  
**Fax:** + 32-2-299 1062

Additional information, and specific questions and answers relevant to other applicants will be published on the Asia-Link website at the following address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/asia-link/index_en.htm

4. INFORMATION SUPPORT

The available EC budget for this area of support is €1.190.000. In addition to grant support, the Asia-Link Programme provides information support in order to promote the establishment of closer EU-Asia co-operation in the field of higher education. It is foreseen that this component will be implemented through calls for tender or calls for proposals (to be published on the programme website and in the Official Journal), on the basis of an annual work plan. It will make information available to institutions, associations, academics, and students, and will gather and analyse information on a wide range of subject areas, to include:

- Co-operation programmes supported by the European Commission, the EU Member States, Asian governments and other agencies;
- Course options at higher education institutions in Europe and Asia relating in particular to Asian and European studies;
• Existing provisions for credit transfer and mutual recognition of degrees and quality standards;
• European and Asian higher education systems;
• The accreditation of private institutions;
• Inventories of existing patterns of co-operation, trans-national education and main obstacles to mobility;
• Higher education policy and reform, eg for the transition from centralized to decentralized systems or the promotion of international curricula.

The results of the research and data gathering/analysis will be made available through different media, particularly through the Internet, and through workshops and seminars.