
Implementation of the APS procedure in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels

General information

(June 2014)

Preamble

The main objective of this document is to provide clear and concise information on the implementation of the APS procedure in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB)¹. It is intended for the various stakeholders of the APS procedure, i.e.:

- the Minister of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (MFWB) and its services ;
- Wallonia-Brussels International (WBI) and its services ;
- the higher education institutions (HEIs) of the FWB ;
- the Academy of Research and Higher Education (ARHE), its Chambers and Committees;
- the Commissioners and Delegates of the FWB Government;
- the APS examiner of the FWB ;
- the Wallonia-Brussels Delegation to the People's Republic of China (hereafter, China) ;
- the Embassy and the consulates of Belgium to China;
- the Academic Examination Office at the German Embassy in Beijing (hereafter, APS-Beijing).

This document is therefore not intended for the Chinese “student-candidate” wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB.

This document was drawn up by the Directorate General for non compulsory education and scientific research (DGNCSR) of the MFWB, in co-operation with WBI. It is an information document and has no legal force.

¹ On 25 May 2011, the Parliament of the French Community adopted a resolution replacing the designation “French Community of Belgium” with “Federation Wallonia-Brussels”. As the Belgian Constitution was not amended accordingly, legal texts still include the designation “French Community” while “Federation Wallonia-Brussels” is used in all usual communication. As this brochure is an information tool without legal force, the name “Federation Wallonia-Brussels” will be used.

Introduction

In the context of internationalisation of higher education, the HEIs of the FWB are admitting an increasing number of foreign students. For foreign students coming from a country outside the European Union (EU), the admission decision made by a HEI, is usually a prerequisite for issuing a visa.

In principle, HEIs should check the authenticity and plausibility of the degrees or certificates submitted by the “student-candidate” before enrolling and entering the Belgian territory. However, over the past years, considering the increased number and the variety of forged documents, it has become extremely difficult for the institutions to carry out the necessary checks.

At the instigation of the federal public services of foreign affairs, of interior and of justice, the French and Flemish Communities have decided to establish a specific procedure in their respective higher education system in order to support HEIs facing problems of forged documents submitted by Chinese nationals.

Therefore, on 27 April 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany and the General Commissariat for International Relations of the French community (nowadays, WBI) signed a declaration of common intent, requesting the Office of academic examination of the German Embassy in Beijing to check the authenticity and plausibility of the degrees or certificates of Chinese students wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB.

In return, from August 2007, the FWB is sending an examiner to the APS-Beijing for a minimum duration, initially planned, of four weeks per semester. Currently, the examiner is sent by WBI three times a year to APS-Beijing, i.e. in February, May and July.

Furthermore, within the DGNCESR of the MFWB, an APS contact point was established to become the interface between HEIs and APS-Beijing, as well as with any other external partner.

APS Contact point in FWB

Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Administration General for education and scientific research

Directorate General for non compulsory education and scientific research

E-mail: aps@fwb.be

Website: www.enseignement.be/aps

1. Description of the APS procedure

The APS procedure is a prerequisite for issuing a student visa to Chinese nationals wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB. It is therefore **not an academic selection or admission procedure**, which remains a strict competence of HEIs according to the legal provisions applicable in the FWB.

It is also essential to remind that the APS procedure only applies to higher education documents (degrees, transcripts, etc.) issued in China. Thus, a student wishing to start higher education in the FWB on the basis of a secondary-school leaving certificate, shall obtain an equivalence of the diploma in order to apply for admission in a first cycle programme in FWB and will therefore not be subject to the APS procedure.

The criterion of nationality of the “student-candidate” defines thus the general application scope of the APS procedure. Concretely, the APS procedure will only apply to the “student-candidate” of Chinese nationality wishing to be admitted in a HEI of the FWB based on the basis of a Chinese higher education degree(s) and requesting a student visa to a Belgian diplomatic post in China.

The APS procedure takes place in two stages:

(1) Authenticity screening

In the first stage, the authenticity of the documents (degree, certificate, etc.) submitted by the Chinese “student-candidate” is checked by the APS-Beijing experts. It is examined in particular if the degree, certificate or any other document was effectively issued by the institution indicated on the document.

(2) Plausibility interview

In the second stage, the plausibility of the documents (degree, certificate, etc.) submitted by the Chinese “student-candidate” is verified. Documents that look authentic might have been fraudulently produced by Chinese institutions and issued to an individual without the latter passing the programme indicated on the degree or certificate. Based on the transcripts of records, the examiner shall question the student on the curriculum and also check the competences, skills and knowledge acquired by the student.

Following the positive authenticity screening and plausibility interview, the student will receive an APS certificate, in a format specifically agreed between the APS-Beijing and the FWB. The certificate will indicate that the degrees or certificates were screened but it will also indicate the verbal proficiency in English and French of the student, shown during the plausibility interview.

It is important to underline that even if the “student-candidate” can benefit from a complete or partial exemption as described below, the HEI of the FWB can demand the application of the APS procedure, for example in case of doubt on the authenticity or plausibility of the documents submitted by the “student-candidate”.

2. Partial exemption of the APS procedure

The “student-candidate” can be exempted from the plausibility interview (phase 2) in the following cases:

- The Chinese “student-candidate” wishes to undertake **doctoral studies** in a HEI of the FWB, including the research stay;
- The Chinese “student-candidate” wishes to pursue higher education in FWB, **in the framework of an official scholarship programme**² organised by WBI, by the Scientific Research Fund (NSRF), by a HEI of the FWB, or exceptionally and after prior examination any other sponsor proven reliable³.

Any request for exemption of the plausibility interview must be transmitted by the HEI of the FWB to the APS contact point in the DGNCESR, which, after checking that the exemption conditions are met, will inform the APS-Beijing.

In practice, the HEIs of the FWB shall send electronically a list of Chinese “student-candidates” for whom exemption of plausibility interview is requested, to the APS contact point in the DGNCESR, indicating:

- the student’s personal details (name, first name, date and place of birth, gender, electronic address) ;
- the Chinese home institution of the “student-candidate” ;
- the programme organised by the HEI in FWB that the “student-candidate” wishes to undertake;
- the official scholarship programme on which the “student-candidate” wishes to undertake higher education in FWB.

After verification, the DGNCESR shall transmit to APS-Beijing, as soon as possible, the list of Chinese “students-candidates” who can benefit from the partial exemption of the APS procedure.

² The “official” nature of the scholarship programme refers to the public (or para-public) nature of the body responsible for the programme. However, potential funders/sponsors from the private sector are not strictly excluded.

³ Regarding potential funders/sponsors, other than those strictly mentioned, it is foreseen to implement:

- on the one hand, a prior information mechanism by the HEIs about the funders/sponsors with whom a cooperation already exists ;
- on the other hand, an information mechanism by WBI via the Belgian and Wallonia-Brussels diplomatic posts of the potential funders/sponsors.

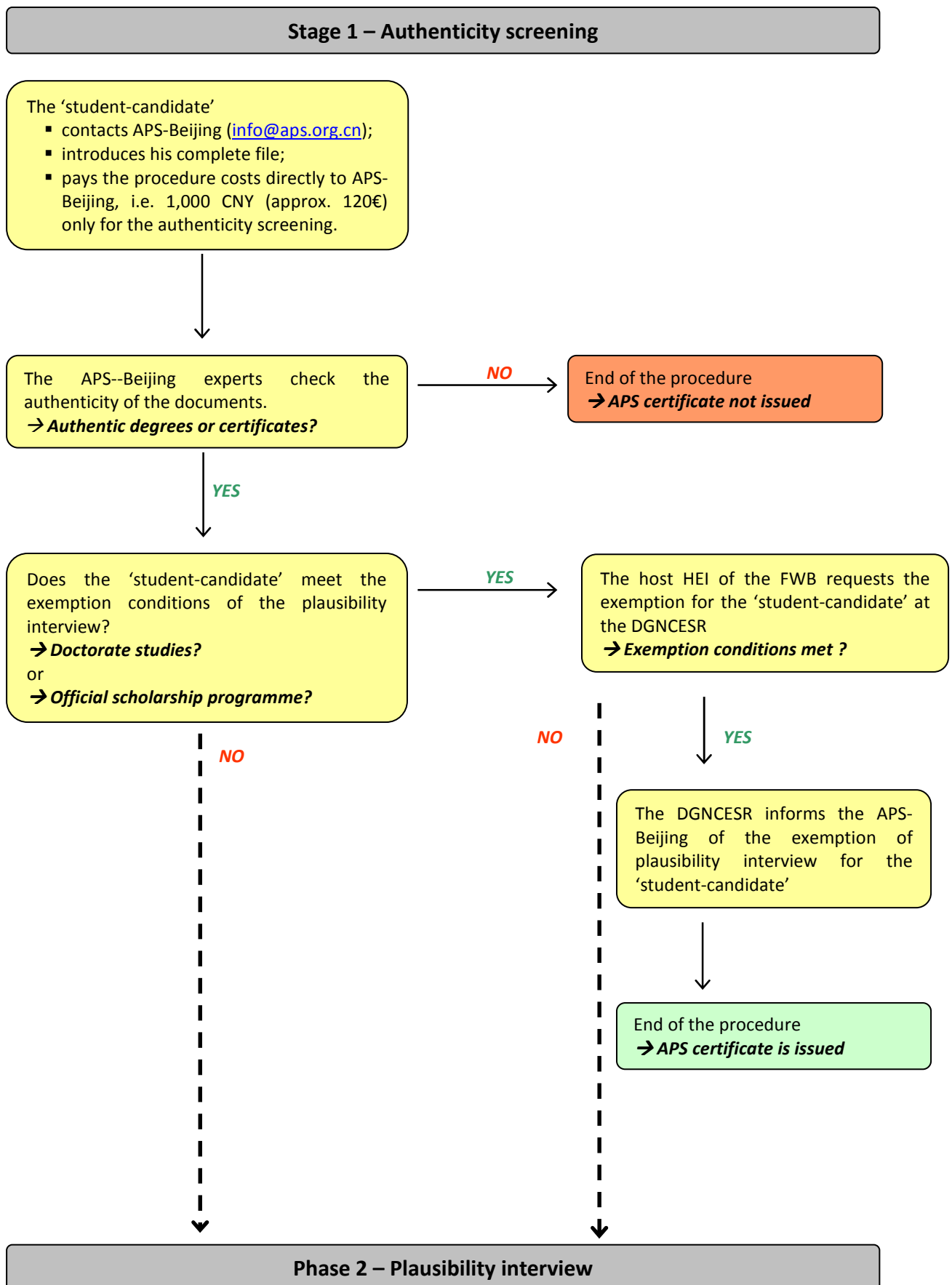
3. Complete exemption of the APS procedure

A full exemption of the APS procedure (plausibility interview and authenticity screening) can be possible in the following cases:

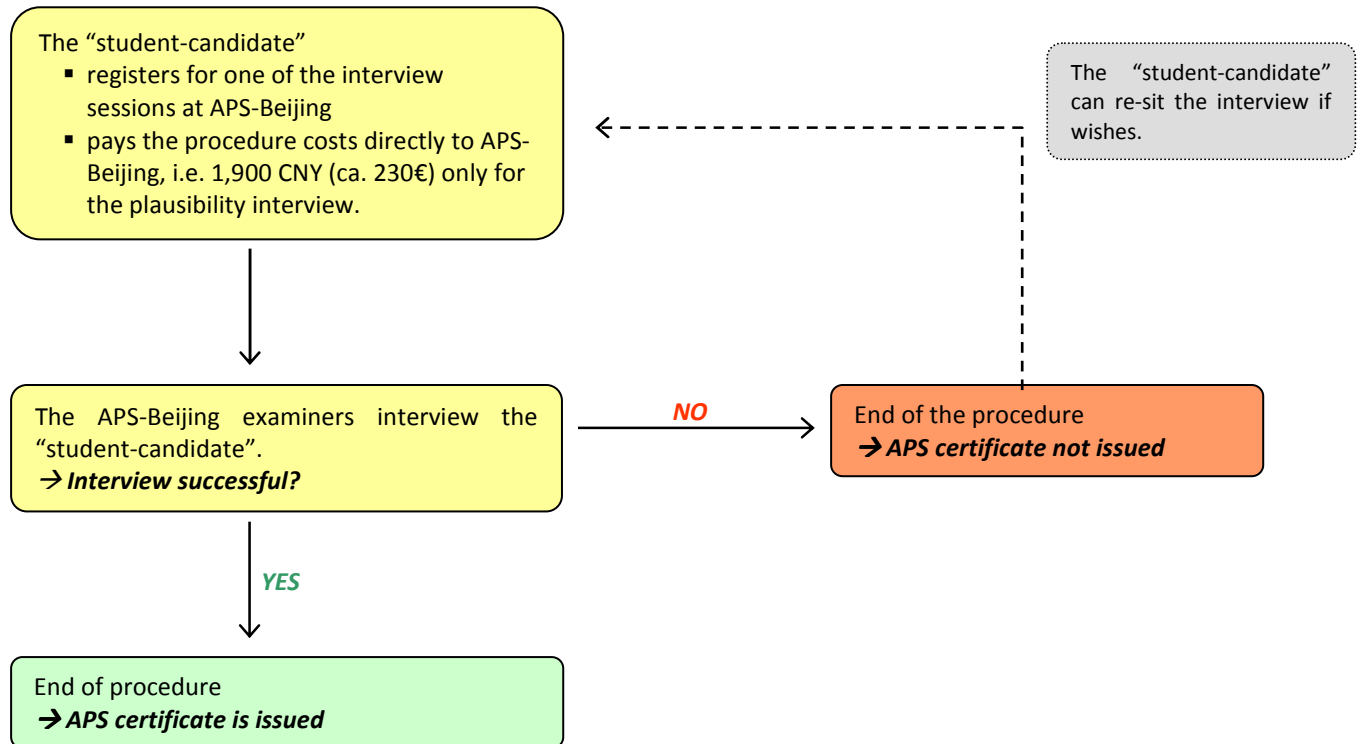
- The “student-candidate” wishes to pursue a part or the entirety of a programme in a HEI of the FWB, **in the framework of an inter-institutional cooperation agreement or an EU programme (providing that this agreement was previously communicated to the DGNCESR);**
- The “student-candidate” wishes to undertake doctoral studies in the FWB and has received a **China Scholarship Council (CSC) grant**, either granted unilaterally by the CSC, or in the framework of the Memorandum for education and scientific cooperation signed on 2 June 2008 between the CSC on the one hand, and WBI and the FNRS on the other hand;
- The Chinese “student-candidate” wishes to pursue higher education in the FWB and can prove that **he/she successfully finished a higher education programme (at least 30 credits) in a HEI recognised by the competent authorities in a Member State of the European Economic Area;**
- The Chinese “student-candidate” wishes to pursue higher education in the FWB and holds a **degree or certificate awarded by a HEI in Macao, Hong Kong or Taiwan;**

In practice, annually, **by the 15 May at the latest**, the HEIs of the FWB will send electronically the list of cooperation agreements or programmes with Chinese HEIs they are involved in to the APS contact point of the DGNCESR. Any new agreement or programme, concluded after this date, will be communicated to the APS contact as soon as possible.

4. Complete APS procedure – Schematic overview



Phase 2 – Plausibility interview



5. Main missions and tasks of the stakeholders to the implementation of the APS procedure in FWB

Directorate General for non compulsory education and scientific research (DGNCESR)

- Is the contact and information point for the implementation of the APS procedure in FWB, primarily for HEI of the FWB, the APS-Beijing and any other stakeholder (including WBI, Wallonia-Brussels delegation in Beijing, the Belgian embassy in Beijing, etc.);
- Receives and verifies the exemption requests submitted by the HEIs of the FWB;
- Informs the APS-Beijing of the “student-candidates” exempted from the plausibility interview;
- Ensures the information update on the page relating to the APS procedure on the website of the MFWB;
- Evaluates the APS procedure annually by questioning the various stakeholders;
- Proposes modifications to the APS procedure if necessary, in cooperation with the stakeholders.

Wallonie-Bruxelles International

- Sends and assists the examiner of the FWB at the APS-Beijing ;
- Ensures the good communication with the Delegation Wallonia-Brussels and the Embassy and consulates of Belgium in China, by checking the relevance of the information provided on their websites, in cooperation with the DGNCESR;
- Informs the DGNCESR of reliable potential funders/sponsors in China;
- Ensures the relevance of the information related to the APS procedure provided on the website of Wallonia-Brussels Campus, in cooperation with the DGNCESR.

Higher education institutions

- Send to the APS contact point in the DGNCESR a list of Chinese students for whom an exemption of the plausibility interview is requested;
- Send to the APS contact point in the DGNCESR, by 15 May at the latest of the current academic year, the list of cooperation agreements and programmes with the Chinese HEIs they are part of;
- Inform as soon as possible the DGNCESR of any new agreement or programme concluded after 15 May;
- Contribute to the annual evaluation of the APS procedure carried out by the DGNCESR.

Academy of Research and Higher Education

- Formulates advice and modification proposals of the APS procedure to the DGNCESR and WBI.

Examiner

- Goes to China, for a minimum duration of four weeks per semester, in order to cooperate with the APS-Beijing and perform the plausibility interviews of the “student-candidates” wishing to undertake higher education in the FWB;
- Sends a report after each mission to the DGNCESR and WBI, which indicates the main statistical data about the interviews, the “student-candidates” and the problems encountered, and provides general recommendations and any other information he/she deems useful.

APS-Beijing

- Performs the authenticity screening and the plausibility interview for the “student-candidates” wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB;
- Centralises the APS certificates issued to the “student-candidates” wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB;
- Regularly sends an updated list of the APS certificates issued to “student-candidates” wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB, to DGNCESR and WBI.

Belgian embassy and consulates in China

- Inform the “student-candidates” wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB, via the website of the APS procedure, in cooperation with WBI and the DGNCESR;
- Inform WBI and the DGNCESR of possible difficulties related to the APS procedure.

Wallonia-Brussels delegation in Beijing

- Informs the “student-candidates” wishing to pursue higher education in the FWB via the website of the APS procedure, in cooperation with WBI and DGNCESR;
- Informs WBI and the DGNCESR of possible difficulties related to the APS procedure.