



International Seminar  
Cercle des Amis AFS and AFS Alumni DK  
May 30 – 31, 2015 in Copenhagen  
Summary of Minutes



## Day 1 – Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup>

### Participants

<i>Cercle des Amis AFS:</i>	Maximilien Marxer, Michèle Ruffat, Bruno Poisson (Saturday morning)
<i>AFS Alumni DK:</i>	Klaus Faartoft, Birte Holm Sørensen, Birgitta My Anttila, Kirsten M. Anttila, Niels Mikkelsen, Marianne Carstensen
<i>Invited guest Saturday:</i>	Elisabeth Hardt (BoT and WG)
<i>Invited guests Saturday afternoon:</i>	Amalie Ferdinand, chairman of AFS Interkultur DK, Inge Birkholm, Aase Klausen, Fleming Friis Larsen, members of AFS Alumni DK

Welcome: Klaus welcomed everyone, thanked everyone for coming and presented the venue along with the agenda for the seminar, after which Kirsten took over leading the proceedings.

Short presentation of members of the Cercle des Amis AFS, AFS Alumni DK and invited guests. Everyone introduced him- or herself and told the rest of the group a bit (or a bit more) about their AFS background and professional experience.

#### ***Dialogue since November 2014: Maximilien Marxer***

Maximilien and Elisabeth are both members of the Work Group (WG) established by the Board of Trustees (BoT) at the request of AFS Alumni DK, the Cercle des Amis AFS and AFS Japan after the AFS Returnee Day of November 7<sup>th</sup> 2014. Elisabeth is also a member of the BoT.

The WG had had its first meeting by conference call two days prior to the seminar.

The first goal of alumni organisations is to support AFS. Dialogue is necessary in order to create good synergy and results.

There was a discussion about the issue of “interference” (with the national organisations), and to which point alumni organisations should remain neutral and non-political.

Another issue raised by Maximilien Marxer was whether alumni organisations should have or not have their own logo and name.

There might be hope for a change in the attitude of the BoT with the new young chair Christian Werle.

#### **BoT Working group (WG):**

##### *i. Members*

Some members of the WG are employees of AFS INT, National Director (USA) which is a challenge but could also be also constructive.

##### *ii. Terms of reference:*

To promote and sustain a beneficial lifetime connection to AFS. In addition to this, there are the issues of trademark, copyright, resources, financing, relating to the existing structure and (creating) platforms for actively tracking own alumni.

There was a discussion of several topics, such as the fact that it is difficult to explain to potential student recruits and families the high AFS participation fee when AFS host families do not receive any payment and the fact that AFS national organisations do not follow up on problems experienced during the stay. This could be an idea for alumni associations/organisations.



Countries and regions are different which means solutions to problems will differ, too. It was agreed that the decisions and actions of the seminar group should be governed by transparency, openness and consideration.

#### ***Creating Vital AFS Alumni Organisations: Klaus Faartoft***

About 100 people attended the workshop in Paris and everybody showed interest in following our work in the future. Their handwritten names and email addresses proved hard to read afterwards, but despite this, it has been possible to make a list of the majority of the participants. Unfortunately, the organisers of the Centennial were not able to provide lists of participants with relevant information for us either. Neither were there any initiatives to enable returnees from the same year to reunite.

The 'followers' will later receive information about the seminar and its results.

Klaus handed out a compilation of the origin of these fellow AFSers. It shows that most of them returned from their exchange in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and that more than half come from Europe.

It was widely agreed that alumni organisations should be "all-inclusive", meaning open not only to returnees but to host families, friends and anyone who supports the ethos of AFS – host families, for one, represent the biggest number of volunteers.

One idea that was launched was that alumni could organise bus trips for students at the end of their year before departure from the host country: (like in the "old days" in the U.S.).

For research and other purposes, the Cercle des Amis AFS uses a specific software (that Maximilien has developed with another volunteer) which is a database with different functions, such as intranet. It might be possible for any other AFS Alumni organisation to use this software with prior consent of the developer on data and price.

In Denmark, there are issues with the data registration laws so this has to be observed.

#### ***Strategy, directions and future actions: Birgitta My Anttila***

There is a need and a will to harvest the potential of returnees in a new and better way and the momentum is happening now. The strategy is more than developing a charter, and we should think of mailing lists, guidelines etc. as tools which enable us to get in contact with and include new people in our endeavours. How we use our tools should be part of our strategic development and thinking.

There are many ideas – "Best Practice" document, mailing list from Paris, already existing lines of communication, list of initiatives.

#### ***Best Practice Document: Kirsten M. Anttila***

The document was edited, during which process the title was changed to "Helpful Guidelines". Changes to this first version should be in by June 8<sup>th</sup>. Copyright issues were discussed – it was agreed that it is a dynamic document and the authors will ask future users to kindly mention them.

#### ***Alumni organisations from the view of an AFS partner organisation: Amalie Ferdinand***

1. Many alumni are already engaged with AFS and are invited for a number of activities several years after their return. The main question is therefore: What is the purpose of setting up separate AFS alumni Organisations? Once the purpose is defined that should frame the activities (promote the AFS Partner programme; Social Club; Scholarships and fund raising)
2. She suggested two ways of organising: As separate organisations or as a sub-group of the AFS Partner in the country.
3. She requested a clear definition of the target group of AFS alumni organisations i.e. Who? When?
4. Presentation of a lifecycle view of interest in and capacity for voluntary work in AFS – similar to the one used in AFS Alumni Denmark several years ago



5. Actions required from the AFS Partner point of view: Fundraising and scholarships; Contacts – especially to the political system; Visibility

**Group sessions:**

**1. Collaboration and Strategy:**

**Collaboration with the national organisations.** Collaborations should be based on national settings, structures and experiences. Therefore, there is no 'best practice' in terms of one definite model of building alumni/returnee organisations. The Helpful Guidelines initiated after the workshop in Paris is a paper based on AFS Alumni DK's and Cercle des Amis AFS' own experiences and intended as an inspiration to others who would like to establish returnee/alumni- organisations.

A directory mapping the different existing organisations was initiated by the Cercle des Amis AFS in 2014 and the directory will be updated this summer. The update will be led by Maximilian who is both President of the Cercle des Amis AFS and a member of the Board of Trustees Working Group on lifting returnee potential.

The directory will:

- help map returnee initiatives, both formal and informal
- inspire by showing how differently things can and have been done
- help expand the returnee network, as returnees often have international careers and might be active in another country or region than where they originate from.

When the directory is forwarded to partners/national organisations, national Heads or Boards should be cc'ed, in order for all parties to be informed. It is key that all collaboration is built on trust and transparency.

Birte Holm Sørensen and Birgitta My Anttila will start working on a mutual vision, as the returnee potential encompass those who have been active within the AFS partner organisations, as well as those who have not. The exchange in itself is an individual activity and the value of the experience truly transpires after the return to the home country. Returnees with international careers often meet and work in regional rather than national settings and in order to harness their experience and network a mutual vision for the returnees on a global scale is necessary.

**Collaboration between AFS alumni organisations**

AFS Alumni DK and Cercle des Amis AFS have benefitted greatly from exchanging ideas and practical experience and this work will continue in the future. As both organisations have had a fair deal of communication with other returnees on an international level, this work is expected to continue in the future. The organisations have helped maintain and rebuild connections between exchange students, host families and partner organisations and the updated directory will help greatly with this.

**2. How to develop initiatives mentioned in the Best Practice Document**

**This group discussed the Best Practice Document presented earlier.** There were a few additional comments to the document (which will be circulated separately)

- Name a returnee "Captain of the Year" to be the contact and network person – for host families, too?
- Make sure to coordinate with the national AFS office about your idea and plans, preferably through regular meetings and/or collaboration fora.
- Be present – in an entertaining and interesting way – at the General Assembly of the national organisation, to show what the alumni organisation offers and stands for.



## Day 2 – Sunday May 31<sup>st</sup>

### Participants

*Cercle des Amis AFS:* Maximilien Marxer, Michèle Ruffat,

*AFS Alumni DK:* Klaus Faartoft, Birte Holm Sørensen, Birgitta My Anttila, Kirsten M. Anttila, Niels Mikkelsen, Marianne Carstensen

### Reflections on Saturday's work

The role of AFS International and national partners today: managing intercultural exchanges and education, which they do well and very business like.

Role of Alumni groups: *Reunite*, remember, and *support* AFS actions around the world.

We shall cooperate loyally with the Working Group (WG) on Alumni established by the Board of Trustees (BOT). We may help the BoT WG by collecting a directory with facts about alumni groups around the world and their activities, official status etc. This will be done by expanding the already made inquiry by the Cercle des Amis AFS with a number of new questions (see the questions below). The inquiry will be sent to AFS partners (to national chairpersons with copies to the national director) and to "followers" ( i.e. returnees who gave their mail-addresses when attending the Workshop « Creating Vital Returnees Organisations » held at the Centennial in Paris at the initiative of the Danish and French AFS alumni organisations).

Maximilien will expand the questionnaire, distribute it, and collect the information, which will be compiled into a Study. He will also inform the BoT WG about this initiative in a joint letter from Elisabeth and him. Furthermore, they will inform about the development and distribution of the Helpful Guidelines. At a proper occasion, Maximilien will ask how the minutes of the BoT WG will be distributed – and to whom?

**The video made by Birgitta My Attila at the Returnee Day.** This will be split up into small 'teasers' by My.

**Helpful Guidelines.** A number of additional suggestions were made. Klaus and Kirsten will distribute an updated version, the participants are to send their suggestions no later than June 3<sup>rd</sup>. Klaus and Kirsten will finalise the Helpful Guidelines to be distributed by June 8th. They will decide too how Françoise Perraud's document: "How to find long-lost returnees" can be used best.

**Distribution of documents.** Distribution of the *minutes* and the Helpful Guidelines will be made by MM to Partner list, French alumni members, [www.cercleafs.fr](http://www.cercleafs.fr), Bill Meserve (BoT), and by KF to participants, followers, Alumni DK members and [www.AFSalumni.dk](http://www.AFSalumni.dk). Recipients will be asked kindly to respect the authors, when quoting/copying the Guidelines. Any useful reaction or suggestion are welcome and a special mail address to be used for this purpose will be set up by AFS Alumni DK as [helpfulguidelines@afsalumni.dk](mailto:helpfulguidelines@afsalumni.dk) Maximilien will discuss with Elisabeth what and when to distribute information to the BoT, preferably before the upcoming BoT-meeting in Costa Rica.

**Collaboration and Strategy.** Maximilien will update the Directory/Study with national partners and "followers" using a Google application. It is essential, that national chairpersons and directors be informed, so that there is full openness about our activities. Some points to be included in the inquiry are:

- Is there an alumni group in the country/region and when was it established?
- Is the alumni group integrated in the national AFS organisation, or is it a separate organisation?
- Does it have Charter, separate bylaws and a logo?
- Why was the alumni group established?
- What are the activities of the group?
- What is the total membership?



- Does it have its own webpage or other media?
- Who are contact persons – including their e-mail addresses?

Discussion on **Common logo, Partnership agreement & Potential legal obstacles:**

Maxmillien informed the attendants on the experiences of Cercle des Amis France. In short, a sub-licence agreement has been signed between Cercle des Amis AFS, AFS Vivre Sans Frontière and AFS IP.

The AFS logo is copyrighted by the AFS foundation in Switzerland, AFS IP license it and they are the only ones who can sublicense this to partner organisations.

The Cercle des Amis AFS has had experiences with members confusing the exchange organisation with the alumni organisation, so it is a good idea to have a clear distinction between the alumni and the exchange organisation logo.

An idea would be a logo that supports AFS and at the same time presents the history of AFS, so that we signal that we are supporting AFS without being mistaken for being AFS Partners.

Maxmillien suggested that all alumni organisations worldwide have a common visual identity and has raised the question with the Board of Trustee's workgroup (WG). As we at present are primarily two alumni organisations who drive the returnee work forward, the need for a common logo is not urgent, but as soon as more organisations are being established this is an issue that need to be addressed.

Klaus Faartoft mentioned that in view of the much debated pros and cons for the name alumni, it had proved useful when finding existing organisations and that it was through 'googling' the word: 'afs alumni' that the contact between the Cercle des Amis AFS and AFS Alumni DK had been established. This speaks for keeping the word alumni in the organisation's name. Yes, and besides, it is a nod to the educational vocation of AFS.



## Objectives for the future:

Until **the next meeting** between Cercle des Amis AFS and AFS Alumni DK will be in **Paris Nov 28.-29 2015** the focus will be on:

- Looking for and getting more new “partners”
- Map existing organisations and their activities by the directory and the following study
- Create a knowledge bank in the sense that communication to either Cercle des Amis AFS or AFS Alumni DK on specific needs (help on how to find people, how to build an organisation, how to communicate with partners, how to work social media etc.) is forwarded to all board members in order to give the best qualified response to potential queries.
- Draft a shared objective/charter. This in order to encompass two different kinds of potential members, the ones who have been active within the AFS partner organisations and the ones who have used the exchange experience to work within other organisations, often on an international scale.

**The overall purpose of setting up Alumni Organisations.** While the purpose of AFS Alumni Organisations is well expressed: *Reunite, Remember, Support* - this need further explanations as was evident from Amalie’s presentation and the subsequent discussion on Saturday afternoon. Birte and My agreed to suggest a vision/mission statement to be circulated internally for comments before the November meeting in Paris.

AFS Alumni DK with Birte Holm Sørensen et al. were in charge of compiling and editing the summary of minutes.