



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



## Workshop with HEIs and NARICs – ARENA project

Time: Tuesday, 01.12.2020 (12:00 – 15:00 CET)

Place: Online meeting – Zoom

Participants: Margriet van de Leur (NUFFIC), Megan van der Moezel (University of Utrecht), Stefan Sant (MQRIC), Jon Vercellono (MQRIC), Josef Buttigieg (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology), Roberta Gatt (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology), Roberta Zammit (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology), Bessy Athanasopoulou (D.O.A.T.A.P), Maria Drakaki (International Hellenic University), Erlend Bern Aaser (NOKUT) and Kristina Rognlien Aardal (NOKUT).

### 1. Current status for the project and looking towards 2021 (Erlend Bern Aaser)

- Today's workshop (WP4) is to prepare everyone for the following work packages: WP5 and WP7.
- The consortium is divided into three different groups: project team, steering group and HEIs.
- We had the first partnership meeting in June (WP1), the kick-off meeting in October (WP2) and this one today – all according to schedule. In terms of the status of the project: The four remaining refugees country briefings (Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan and Palestine) will be published soon, and the consortium will be informed.
- Focus areas for today: better understanding of the methodology, what is the Toolkit and how to implement it in your respective countries, institutional needs and initial planning of the upcoming work packages.

### 2. Principles, tools, and experiences from testing at HEIs in the REACT project: Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications and Q-Card for Admission Officers (Erlend Bern Aaser)

- Methodology: when the toolkit was developed in 2016, with the project running from 2016-2018, the purpose was to look at which methodology and tools that were already in use in the different NARICs, and which tools could be used to address the challenges. There was a need for the institutions, NARICs and other organizations to provide structured hands-on tool that was easy to implement and use.
- Principles, tools and approaches: 8 principles for guiding the process, 10 tools were developed to constitute the parts of the procedure. Based on these principles and tools, 2 approaches were created in terms of systematising into procedures.
- Principles: accessibility, information provision, equal treatment, competent treatment, effectiveness, transparency, relevance and portability.
- Tools: Country databases, refugees country briefings, verification, questionnaire/self-evaluation template, interview template and template for the final status. We need these tools to address the challenges in order to map the refugees' qualifications.
- Approaches: QPR with its stage. Using interviews as a supplement to ordinary procedures.
- Experiences from REACT and approaching the testing: five universities tested the methodologies (document-based and interview-based) for assessing refugees' qualifications.



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



- The universities were systemising the work to implement the Toolkit: target group, identifying needs, institutional mandate, relevant tools, adapting procedures, testing and report on results.
- The NARIC centres and NOKUT were in contact with the universities along this work, and NOKUT will also provide assistance in the following work packages when needed.
  - Results from the REACT project: the universities used different tools to assess the candidates' qualifications, as the types of programmes the candidate applied for varied among the universities. Questionnaire was the most used tool among the universities.
  - Q-Card for Admission Officers: experiences and lessons learned from the testing at HEIs in the REACT project.
  - Challenges: target group, documentations, coordination of activities within the institutions, awareness and commitment.
  - Opportunities: examine the legal framework, alternative evaluation methods e.g. interviews, internal alignment and clear infrastructure, mutual learning and cooperation.
  - Action: identify the opportunities you can offer at your institution, make necessary adjustment in the procedures, establish a coordination centre/contact person and raise awareness and establish sustainable strategy.
  - Mutual expectations and thinking ahead: this workshop is meant to give a better understanding of the methodology, the institutional needs and framework for cooperation. Next work packages (WP5 & WP7) will start in January 2021.

### **3. Current practices and priorities at participating HEIs from Greece and Malta**

Maria Drakaki (International Hellenic University):

- Refugee access to education - situation in Greece: legal framework at bachelor level: refugees that graduate from Greek secondary education can take Panhellenic Exams (as the Greek nationals do) and enter university degree programmes in HEIs in Greece.
- Current procedures in place for refugees or persons in a refugee-like situation: there is no distinction for refugees in the context of entrance qualifications to HEIs. IHU is a public Greek university, and therefore, it is subject to the Greek law regarding student entrance qualifications for higher education. According to the Greek law, students take the Panhellenic exams.
- Bachelor degree studies: there is no distinction for refugees in the context of entrance qualifications to HEIs.
- As of 2020, a new law was passed that all Greek universities can establish bachelor and master degree programmes taught exclusively in English. These programmes will have different admissions requirements than the ones taught in Greek.
- Up to this date, one bachelor degree programme is offered in English, and this programme started in the academic year 2020/2021: BA in Archaeology, History, Literature of Ancient Greece, jointly offered by National and Kapodistrian of Athens and International Hellenic University.
- Admissions to this BA: International Baccalaureate or Senior High School Graduation Certificate (indicative average grade 70 % or equivalent), certificate of competency in English (ITOEFL, IELTS and FCE). There are no tuition fees for the programmes taught in Greek, but there is a tuition fee for this English taught programme.



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



- Postgraduate studies (master degree programmes), which is the aim for the project: there is no distinction for refugees in the context of entrance qualifications to HEIs. Each department accepts students based on some predetermined criteria, published in the governments gazette for each individual postgraduate programme including a “valid” bachelor degree: a degree obtained in a Greek public university or a degree obtained abroad and recognized by DOATAP.
- Admissions at IHU University Center of International Programmes of Studies (UCIPS): UCIPS is a special academic unit offering postgraduate programmes that are taught exclusively in English to Greek and foreign students. The testing of the Toolkit will take place at UCIPS.
  - Admissions requirements at the School of Science and Technology: adequately documented qualifications; detailed CV, copy of the first cycle university degree in Science, Engineering, Technology (in Greece or equivalent institutions obtained abroad and recognized by DOATAP), copy of the transcript of grades, certification of English language proficiency, letters of recommendations and photographs.
  - Inadequately documented qualifications: non valid bachelor degree programme (according to DOATAP decision) and IELTS score below the required minimum.
  - Challenges faced with assessing refugee qualifications: there is no distinction for refugees in the context of entrance qualifications to HEIs, only refugees who fulfil the university’s entrance requirements at a bachelor or master degree level can be accepted.
  - Recruitment is handled by the programme managers and academic staff committees. Main barrier regarding acceptance of refugees with inadequate or no qualifications is the Greek legislation.
  - If legislation could adopt some alternative pathways, e.g. entrance based on Toolkit 3 and/or combined with EQPR, the recruitment procedure would adopt to the new alternative and access to refugees with inadequate or no qualifications would be enabled.
  - Recruitment at UCIPS in the context of ARENA project and testing the Toolkit. The pool of students that could take part in the testing could include: students currently enrolled at UCIPS, who come from refugees countries including Iran, Cameroon and Palestine – a simulation experiment: these students probably are not refugees and they have been accepted at UCIPS, and therefore they have all necessary qualifications.
  - A different group will include refugees who have attained the EQPR with DOATAP: this group will be decided jointly with DOATAP.
  - A third group could include refugees without any recognized qualifications. This group could be decided jointly with UNHCR.
  - Target group: Syria, Cameroon, Iraq, Iran and Palestine. Will work with DOATAP by co-organizing the target refugee groups for testing the Toolkit and discussing the results of the testing. Use the country briefings for refugees that already exist, and use the country briefing for Palestine developed in this project.
  - Motivation for the students (who do not fulfil the admissions requirements) to join: they could be admitted on the basis of obtaining a certificate of attendance - attending classes on a seminar basis if funding is available and obtain a certificate of attendance.
  - Main objectives to achieve in the ARENA project: IHU’s main mandate is to provide higher education especially to international students, contribute to enabling the access of refugees to higher education in Greece by contributing the development of a sustainable solution by participating in the ARENA project and testing the Toolkit, develop the process which could be adopted (and translated to legislation) by Ministry of Education and



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



Religious Affairs and therefore the HEIs, that will enable access of refugees to further studies via alternative pathways than those that are currently available, and to raise awareness.

### Josef Buttigieg (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology):

- Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) is different from other institutions as of the level of studies and programmes offered at the institution.
- MCAST was established in 2001 and is a rather young institution. MCAST is the country's leading Vocational Education and Training institution, offering over 190 full-time courses of study and close to 100 part-time courses of study.
- Recent developments include the Skills Kits programme, more courses on apprenticeship and master degrees amongst others.
- MCAST has a big campus, the buildings are now being re-constructed. This is done without disrupting the full-time and part-time courses. MCAST has six different institutes.
- The Office of the Deputy Principal – Registrar: main responsibilities: certification, diploma supplements, notification of performance, graduations etc., attendance and stipends and students admissions and records.
- All the courses offered at MCAST are free of tuition fees, for both Maltese and international students. People outside of EU are exempted from paying tuition fees, so refugees and immigrants go through the “Straight forward process” for exemption of paying tuition fees. Around 90 per cent of the students at MCAST are full-time students and do not pay tuition fees. Full-time students receive admission grants and stipend (monthly payments). Every person applying at MCAST, pass through the same admissions office.
- Admissions and records: the number of registered full-time students during the school year 2019/2020 is 6418, which include: new candidates, students progressing to a higher level-course, students continuing the second or subsequent year of their studies, students repeating a unit/s of the course in order to conclude their qualification, new candidates admitted as mature students, international applicants studying at the College come from over 50 different countries.
- MCAST does not make a distinction between Maltese students or international students. The admissions department focuses on everyone in the same manner, giving the same accessibility, clearly establishing the entrance requirements and the prospectus is the legally binding document.
- Prospectus 2020-2021: the office of the registrar is responsible for the publication of the annual full-time courses prospectus, reference document, information regarding the various departments and offices, and services around the College, details regarding all full-time courses offered at MCAAT during the academic years 2020-2021 and the progression map. The progression map is a guide with all the courses which are offered at MCAST.
- Entry levels and progression: six different levels, with higher diploma at level 5 and Bachelor degree at level 6 (+ Master degree at level 7).
- The majority of refugees, immigrants and people without any entry qualifications usually focus on level 1 Introductory Certificate/Award/Pathway to Independent Living or level 2 Foundation Certificate (where they learn Maltese as a foreign language). Easier to admit them to these two levels than to the levels of higher education. Skills Kits, which is a level 1 course is meant for refugees and immigrants in order to gain certain skills (academics: English, mathematics etc. and vocational modules).



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



MCAST does not have refugees studying a degree, and MCAST needs procedures on integrating refugees to their university. MCAST, asked by the government entity (the Human Rights and Integration Directorate), offers an integration part-time course (level 1) for refugees and immigrants. At the higher levels, MCAST don't have many refugees in the highest levels, and one of the reasons can be lack of awareness.

- MCAST are working closer with UNHCR + Jesuit Refugee Service, a Maltese NGO, and have discussed to meet these two entities for a cooperation. MCAST will use the experience from this project and what they learned so far, and once they meet UNHCR and Jesuit Refugee Service, MCAST can come up with what is needed in order for MCAST to give a better contribution and participation in the testing of the Toolkit.

#### **4. Experiences from testing of the Toolkit at Utrecht University in the REACT project – including Q&A session (Megan van der Moezel)**

- The regular procedures: in the Netherlands there is a law that decides who is allowed to do a bachelor's degree and who is not. It states all the admissions requirements and the university is interpreting the law and deciding who to admit and not to admit.
- Master's degrees: the programmes decide who they enrol and not enrol, which makes it challenging to decide how to find an alternative pathway.
- In practice, we noticed that most of the people that we were going through the entire procedure with were applying for master's degrees because there is more liberty on our end in that part.
- Normal procedures: students apply on the website where they insert all the information, answer on questions we have added on their previous education and amongst other thing they have to upload transcript and diploma for their previous schooling.
- Hardly ever had people applying via the website who did not have all of their documents available, and we are not entirely sure whether this is because most people actually do have all of the necessary documents or because by the time people see that they have to upload these documents they cancel their application.
- With the toolkit we were focusing on finding an alternative way to verify the previous education of the refugees instead of having them to be obligated to upload a diploma and transcript, so we set up a way for them to contact us. We did that via the student deans and a refugee contact that we already had at the university. This project was called Inclusion, and it provided refugees the chance to follow courses for free at the university and through this pathway some of them were made aware that without a diploma and/or transcript they could still apply for an actual degree programme at the university.
- We set up a special email address they could contact us to be explained the procedure.
- Tools used in the REACT project: used several tools, and some of the tools proved more useful than others, dependent on the structure in the admissions office in the university.
- We split the tools into two categories: the first one was aimed at supplementing the existing credential evaluation within our admissions office, we usually use online sources such as the NUFFIC website or the NARIC websites and all of the information that is available on those websites. We also use our own previous evaluations, so we have a big database of different universities, different diplomas, different studies and how we evaluated those in the past years. A combination of that is used by our admissions office to decide whether a background is comparable to the equivalent that is minimally required in order to get access or to be admitted or if something is still missing and has to



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



- be adjusted before someone can be admitted. Within judging the previous credentials we included the refugees country briefings if we had applicants from those countries, the databases collection and also the self-evaluation questionnaire because this includes information that would normally be found on the transcript. We also used the level placement in cooperation with NUFFIC.
- Before we evaluated the credentials, we built in separate steps: to ask the refugees to fill out the self-evaluation questionnaire. This questionnaire was mainly aimed at providing all of the necessary information to judge whether the knowledge someone had was sufficient for the program as well as to evaluate whether they actually had the degree they claimed to have. Then conducting interviews to confirm the information from the self-evaluation questionnaires.
  - The self-questionnaire is an alternative way for verification of insufficient/lacking documentation and in combination with interviews.
  - Testing period: 9 people approached, 6 eligible candidates, 3 respondents and 2 conditional admissions with the candidates going through the full procedure.
  - Challenges: people approached because they did not have the sufficient documents, but they had not yet thought about which program they wanted to attend. Cannot evaluate admissibility unless we know what someone is applying for.
  - Time challenge was the main one: we had six months in total to start the testing phase, but at that time the internal alignment was not entirely completed yet, so in the end by the time we went live with the email address with the regular admissions procedure being compared, we were already a little bit further ahead in the season.
  - Determining eligibility was one of the challenges because the communication with the applicants took time. Level placement had to be in order before they filled out the self-evaluation questionnaire, then find a date to schedule the interview.
  - The Corona situation: might be easier if you can do it online, because you will not have to find a date where you all can be physically present at the university. Different challenges as a result of this, because it will probably be harder to read someone digitally than when someone is sitting right across from you in person.
  - Lessons from the previous project: to make a more narrow plan for the next round. Take into accounts the deadline that we normally have. Students have to apply and be admitted before the end of May at the latest, that means we need to have everything ready and scheduled in sufficient time to go through the Toolkit part to leave someone sufficient time to after that still apply online and be in time for the deadlines.
  - Select specific tools that complement your admissions procedures as it exist the best instead of trying to assess everything at the same time. Limiting the candidates to people who wants to apply for masters instead of also including bachelors because of the legal framework. Limit your window or the programmes and tools you are going to use. The more you include, the more time it takes to prepare before you can start with the testing.
  - In our case it was a strategic choice to only actively inform students who proactively approached us through the email, in order to limit the number of applicants.
  - Main objectives in ARENA: developing more sustainable procedure, raising awareness and dialogue, and internal cooperation. Find a standardised alternative pathway that we can use and implement internally.
  - **Q&A:**  
Q: How did the two students do in the programmes?



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



A: The students did not start, as the first candidate did not manage to meet the language requirements and will try again next school year. The other candidate had to finish prep-courses in order to be admitted to the master's programme but failed one of them, and did therefore not meet all the requirements of admission.

Q: Were both students applying for master's degree?

A: One applied for a bachelor's degree, the one who did not fulfil the language requirements, and the other one applied for a master's degree.

Q: Was it possible to enter in the second or third year?

A: In this case, we only looked at starting from scratch. If they would be enrolled from second or third year, then the interview would have to be structured differently, with determining the level of knowledge and determining how much is finished.

Q: Out of the 9 people who approached, were they mostly applying for bachelor's degrees or master's degrees?

A: Around 50 per cent of applicants applying for bachelor's degrees and 50 per cent applying for master's degrees.

## 5. Group work: initial planning of the testing period and managing sustainability of procedures

### Greece (Bessy Athanasopoulou):

- Principles from the Toolkit that are most important when adapting their procedures: information provision, effectiveness and portability.
- Tools to explore further as part of the testing period: questionnaires, country briefings and interviews.
- Cooperation and task distribution organised between the national HEI and NARIC: International Hellenic University will lead the testing, and DOATAP will identify target group, mostly from those that have already received the EQPR (who holds a degree or close to hold a degree). They could be good candidates for IHU to go further on with their admissions tools. The university itself will possibly have applicants as well.
- The other questions need to be more discussed.

### Malta (Stefan Sant):

- Principles from the Toolkit that are most important when adapting their procedures: portability, because even once you get access and get qualification, we have noticed that entry requirements do sometimes crop up as an issue. The entry requirements and criteria for recognition are something that need to be defined and made default, at least at international level.
- Tools to explore further as part of the testing period: interviews. Right now, the interview stage under COVID-19 does not cause a problem, but at the practical point of view: how will certain people have access to room of communication - this is only a temporary problem.
- Cooperation and task distribution organised between the national HEI and NARIC: once we start face-to-face interviews, we want to try to assess what is going to be done depending on the level of the course or programme of study that is going to be assessed toward the people are conducting the interviews. We have to make sure that the logistics are workable, for both MCAST and the other entities. Once this project is over, we want to publish this as a toolkit for the whole country as a uniformed matter.
- How to proceed with planning for the practical implementation of the work package next year: finalize this issue in the beginning of January 2021.



Project coordinated by NOKUT [www.nokut.no](http://www.nokut.no)



- Expectations from NOKUT, as the project coordinator, during this process: we will be developing the project to suit the requirements and needs of our country. We have an idea of what NOKUT has been doing, but we want to work in parallel with what the Hellenic part also is doing. And we want to create something ad-hoc for the requirements of Malta.
- Challenges of the COVID-19 situation and how it can have an impact on the testing process at the institution: the technical issues of doing face-to-face interviews.

**6. Summary of meeting and looking ahead towards upcoming activities** (Erlend Bern Aaser)

- Agreement that the participants will work on answering the questions from the group discussions in writing and provide them to NOKUT **within Tuesday next week** (8.12).
- A continuing dialogue in the beginning of next year to follow on the questions from the group discussion and to look at where we are now, where are we heading and how we should get there together.
- We have accomplished a lot today: to better understand the methodology, to discuss the basis of the methodology, have an arena for closer cooperation on a national level and to initiate the further dialogue between all of us.
- In terms of looking ahead, the formal start of the work packages is in January next year. The national NARICs and HEIs will organize the processes, and NOKUT will be following up with everyone in January. NOKUT will also develop some information material and questions to further our dialogue as the work package progress.
- Minutes and presentations will be sent by the end of this week.
- Administrative process: we are waiting for some contracts, and we will come with more information on this next week. More information will also be given to the partners regarding reporting, before the holidays.
- Refugees country briefings: Yemen is already published, and the remaining four briefings will soon be published. NOKUT will keep everyone updated when they are available online.