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**DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR ACCESS OF DISADVANTAGED GROUPS OF PEOPLE  
AND REGIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

**ERASMUS+ CBHE 561547-EPP-1-2015-IL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP**

**EXTERNAL QUALITY MONITORING YEAR 1  
ERASMUS + DARE PROJECT**

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the annual evaluation reports is to verify that partner organisations, and the structures development/implemented follow the general rules and the standards to be maintained during the development of the project. The external evaluation is part of the *Quality Plan* as described by the Quality Assurance Leading Force (QALF). The goal of this exercise is:

- to inform all the DARE partners about main decisions taken to assure the quality of their work;
- to assist each individual development team/partner in implementing these decisions in their environment;
- to provide each partner and the European Commission with sufficient visibility on the consortium and its quality practices

The scope of the external evaluation is exclusively associated with the DARE project and affects all partners belonging to the DARE consortium and other stakeholders participating in the project. It covers only the organisational, administrative and managerial aspects of the project. The external evaluation is a tool of good practice to verify that the project is going on the right direction in order to achieve the project objectives and deliverables planned.

Quality in terms of the DARE project may be addressed from two different angles, both leading to meeting the set objectives in the most appropriate and relevant way:

- Quality as meeting the objectives and expectations set within the project proposal and being further specified by the partnership at the beginning of the project ;
- Quality as avoidance of waste of resources (manpower, financial, material resources etc., taking into account environmental aspects), 'doing the right things according to the working plan.

The goals of the external evaluation are to:

- Provide an external evaluation report of the project
- Analyse the outcomes of the project vs. the initial plan
- Consider the cooperation within the partnership and its impact on the outcomes
- Assess the validity of the project results and plans for the future

The external evaluation will take into account the entire project documentation, including the application and all deliverables. The interim evaluations were provided by the partners via interviews or questionnaires. The questionnaire format was peer reviewed.

## Key indicators and related indicators

- Participation: All partners take part in at least 90% of the meetings and events related to the tasks or activities they have to carry out. All decisions taken together with the operational specifications of the activities are presented in written form and the partners are required to approve these documents in written form.
- Equal opportunities and cross-cutting issues: The value commitment of the partners and stakeholders supports equal opportunities and gender balance.
- Documentation: The working documents and operational specifications of the activities are written and stored in accordance with a pre-defined format.
- Efficacy/Effectiveness: The processes/phases produce the expected results in terms of planned outputs in the timeframe foreseen and within the remit of working plan. The corrective measures are agreed and approved by all partners. The level of the resources employed for carrying out the activities is coherent with the resource level anticipated in the approved project. All corrective measures are approved by all partners.
- Flexibility: Requests to make changes or deviations are notified and explained in written form. The changes or the deviations are approved by all partners before becoming effective. The project is amenable to adapt to emerging needs identified during the project life-cycle.
- Coherence: The processes/phases produce the expected results in terms of planned outputs.
- Relevance: Relevance of the processes and results/outcomes is validated periodically. If necessary corrective measures are put in place.
- Transparency: The nature and level of resourcing available and all processes are transparent to all members of the partnership.
- Correspondence with to European HE context: The project will respect existing tools and instruments within European Higher Education Area and will try to engage involved experts with a good knowledge of social cohesion and accessibility policies.
- Stakeholders' engagement: The project will make utmost to identify key stakeholders and invite their representatives into the project activities in the balanced way.
- Impact : Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. The effect of the project on its wider environment, and its contribution to the wider sector objectives summarised in the projects Overall Objective.
- Sustainability: The likelihood of a continuation in the stream of benefits produced by the project after the period of external support has ended.

## ROLES IN THE PROJECT

The project management structure of DARE guarantees an efficient and well-balanced decision style, where all of the subunits contribute to the quality of the project outcomes. The bodies that are involved in this process are:

**Project Coordinator:** daily financial administration and execution of contract, distribution of grant according to decision of the Steering Committee, assistance with purchase of equipment and tender procedures, preparation of the Project Management Meetings and other consortium events, organization and monitoring of mobility program, submission of necessary reports and contacts with the EACEA.

**Institutional Project Coordinators:** coordinate project activities at the give partner institution, selection of staff member for mobilities, organization of workshops, preparation of partial reports, providing institutional support from partner institution and internal dissemination of project results.

**ISU from Georgia** supports the Project Coordinator in coordinating activities within Georgia, maintaining day to day contacts with all Georgian partners and taking active part in preparation of Intermediate and Final Report.

**Steering Committee:** More formal decisions, (such as amendment of the contract, other contractual decisions), are taken by Steering Committee, which is formed by the Project Coordinator and one local coordinator at each institution. Approval of those decisions by all members of the consortium is required.

**Work package leaders:** The work package leader will have the task of co-ordinating all contributions to guarantee compliance with the set time schedules and coherence with the work package activities and results as well as coherence with activities, results and outcomes of the DARE project as a whole. The work package leaders will be at the same time responsible that the resources allocated to the work package are used with efficiency and to notify to the project co-ordinator possible deviations from the original working plan. The following table presents the project's work package leaders:

Work Package		Leader
1	Comparative report on the basis of the services and frameworks established at institutional level	UMurcia
2.1	Institutional building – purchase of equipment and establishment/modernisation of support student services	Haifa and ISU
2.2	Capacity building – organisation of trainings, development of teaching methodologies	GACE and ISU
2.3	Distance learning for vulnerable groups	EAN
3	Internal Quality control and monitoring	UMurcia, KTU
4	Dissemination	GACE
5	Project management	Haifa

#### Analysis on Work Package Implementation

Work Package	Comments
WP1	There has been the feeling of cooperation since the beginning of the project. The working package leader successfully delivered the deliverables of this working package.
WP2	<p>The following activities are currently in the development stage in partner universities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student steering committee - The "students leading accessibility" group will meet on a monthly basis and strive to address issues regarding disabilities and bring solutions and ideas to management representatives.</li> <li>2. Equipment – Computers and educational computer programs will be purchased and installed in the designed centres.</li> <li>3. Change in regulation in Israel. A letter was written in order to expand funding for disabilities in HEI's the letter will be presented in the upcoming national deans meeting in Israel for approval, following the approval the letter will be sent to the planning and budgeting committee (CHE).</li> <li>4. Digital learning books. A digital course will be developed; the course will be open to all Sapir students. The initial courses on the MOOC will be an accommodated English</li> </ol>

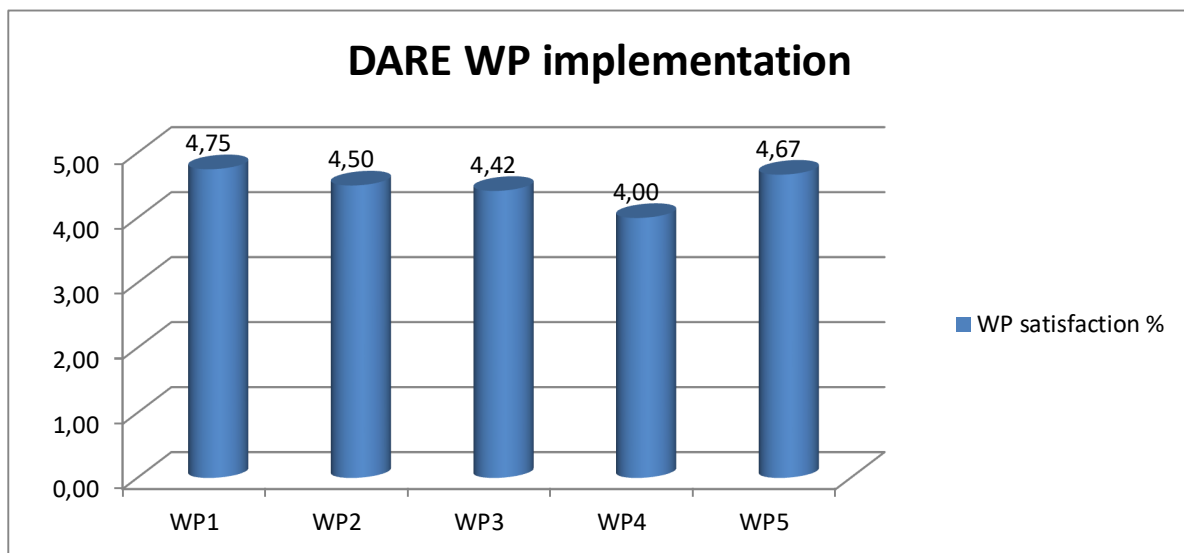
	<p>course and a Hebrew course, each course will provide learning strategies for students.</p> <p>Academic and administrative staff trainings are being developed in each of the partner universities. Some partners will use their own training methodology like GACE.</p> <p>In Georgia, workshops are conducted on the DARE topics: the evaluation methods of students with special educational needs and its improving ways. Other activities have been noted down:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Changing in University regulation changing where students with special educational needs and the representatives of national minorities, are given additional time to prepare and pass the final exams.</li> <li>2. Official state language courses were created which include the students (students with special educational needs, socially unprotected, national minority students) from different faculties.</li> <li>3. At this stage SSU helps students from the conflict regions (Abkhazia and Tskhinvali) and the students with special educational needs in overcoming the difficulties arisen in the teaching/learning process.</li> <li>4. Preparation of English language courses for the spring semester of 2017.</li> <li>5. Active involvement of sports and other activities for the students with special educational needs, socially unprotected, national minority students and the students living in the conflict regions.</li> <li>6. Faculties after enrolment provides the identification of the students with special educational needs, socially unprotected and the students living in the conflict regions.</li> <li>7. Introduction of 'learning disabilities' as topic for DARE action which was not originally foreseen.</li> <li>8. Special equipment for the students of special educational needs and national minority students has been planned but not yet purchased. In Georgia, some partners (Zugzidi, Telavi) needed a complete change of infrastructure and currently the infrastructure for the DARE facilities is under renovation.</li> </ol> <p>Working teams were formed that we made up of Israeli, Georgian and EU members. Progress has been made and development is on track.</p> <p>Some members have not been very active at this stage. Generally speaking, the consortium is doing well. All the GEO and IL partners sent their FWP's on time with all the relevant information. ISU has taken the leadership in the development of the Georgians FWP's regarding people with disabilities (WP 2.1), which was a very important step in achieving the project's goals. Also the team of Masaryk, EAN, Haifa U, Sapir College, Telavi are working very well in the development of WP 2.2</p> <p>One of the weaknesses is that there is minimal cross-package contact with the other WP</p>
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	<p>leaders. This should be corrected in second year.</p>
WP3 QA	<p>Partners acknowledge that there is a very competent QA team. However, the biggest challenge is that at times some partners feel that in the process of developing and implementing programs, some of the deliverables will take longer than planned which can have an impact on implementation. More flexibility was desired therefore.</p> <p>The team is coordinated adequately. Partners receive tasks and deadlines while the team gives them input and brings new ideas of how things should be evaluated and presented. The QA committee contributes to the implementation of other WPs. Materials are sent on time.</p> <p>Hitherto, it seems the WP is conducted efficiently. Nevertheless, there have been some delays in the delivery of the quality assessment tools. The QA team received the documentation requested before the third meeting in Telavi. After receiving the partners' suggestions for assessment tools for Student Support Services (Institutional Building) they were reviewed and given back for improvement and clarification.</p> <p>Among the observation and recommendations for this WP, it seems that instructions were not always clear as of the different steps to be conducted within the project. Likewise, some partners feel that there is too much weight on QA measures which may hinder rather than reinforce its contribution to the project. In a nutshell, there is a fear that QA becomes the core of the project and not a simple process in the DARE project. A balance hereby should be sought. At the same time, contingency measures should be foreseen in order to avoid the delay of QA activities or collection of data.</p>
WP4	<p>Dissemination is a work package that needs to be intensified in the second year, since this should be run on continuous basis. Some institutions did not start yet to promote the project and future outcomes. Some of them are at the beginning of their dissemination strategy and program. Other members have disseminated the program within their institution to key stakeholders.</p> <p>They have been using namely newsletters, staff meetings, visiting of schools of ethnic minorities, and on-line explanations and instructions.</p> <p>Activities that were observed were the launch of a portal by Sapir - being responsible for</p>

	<p>its maintenance. The main purpose so far is internal dissemination and joint work space for the project but also it serves as a database to externally disseminate the project outcomes. Some partners have conducted workshops to promote academic skills and achievements.</p> <p>Some good practices have been observed. For example, the information about the content, objectives and tasks of DARE project in Sokhumi State University was transmitted on one of the TV channels of Georgia – <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBFumsCNeJg&amp;feature=share&amp;list=PL7Folp11yjJdwZ4UuDdN4LtS6mQPreBvt&amp;index=2">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBFumsCNeJg&amp;feature=share&amp;list=PL7Folp11yjJdwZ4UuDdN4LtS6mQPreBvt&amp;index=2</a></p> <p>In Georgia, the information about the second consortium meeting was transmitted on TV also. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tgkA16RAs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tgkA16RAs</a></p> <p>There was also the participation of Georgian partner members at international and regional conferences on DARE thematic areas like issues regarding students of national minorities and special educational needs.</p> <p>At international level, EAN represents a good platform for international exposure. They made visible DARE at its conference of Dublin, Ireland and the EAN executive committee meetings: Vienna October 2015; London, March &amp; October 2016; Dublin, June 2016</p> <p>WP guidelines and stronger leadership should be encouraged. Activities within this WP are led to the partners.</p>
WP5	<p>The instructions and the guidance are very complicated were changed several of times. We found ourselves dealing with bureaucracy too often.</p> <p>We think that travel-cost should more flexible according to the cost of living of each country.</p> <p>Ilia is taking care of all financial matters on behalf of all GEO partners. Manana is really easy to work with and she brings her skills and knowledge to the project, guiding the whole consortium on financial issues.</p>



When we asked the different coordinators about their involvement and satisfaction with the different WPs, the project that was more satisfactory was the preparatory work coordinated by UMurcia followed by the general coordination and management of University of Haifa. Although all the WPs present good signs of development, but the one that should be addressed in year 2 is dissemination.



## EFFECTIVENESS

Being at an early stage of implementation, one of the aspects that drew our attention was the contribution of the partners towards the main objectives of the project. According to the original Logical Framework (LFM) there were 8 main objectives to reach:

Objective 1: to improve the access to and quality of inclusive higher education for minority ethnic groups, women in disadvantaged situations and in peripheral areas and disabled students

Objective 2: To improve access to HE so as to strengthen social cohesion, increase equal opportunities and lessen social and gender inequalities

Objective 3: To create the basis for a sound project implementation (approval of development, quality, dissemination and exploitation plans, risk analysis and contingency plans)

Objective 4: To improve institutional capacities through the reinforcement and provision of support services at GE and IL partner universities in four main areas (child care, clinical and occupational psychological, learning and physical disabilities, academic support) with special equipment and revised recruitment and retention regulations.

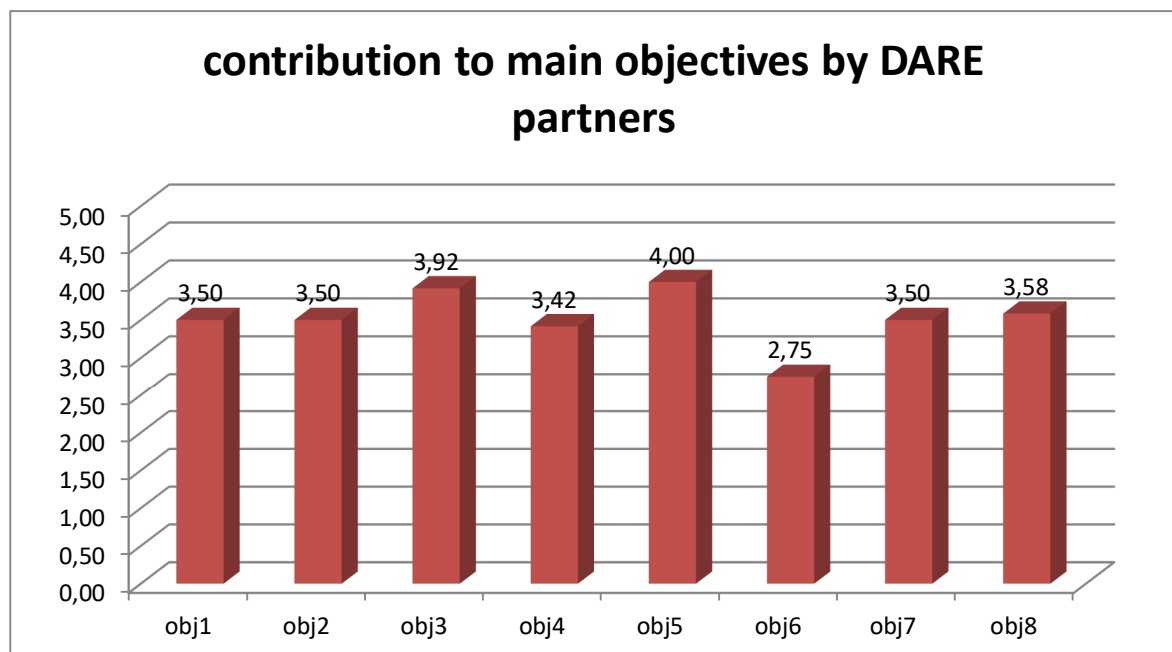
Objective 5: To train faculty members, professional and administrative staff on the use of the established or reinforced services for vulnerable target groups and to create a group of trained specialists at each IL and GE partner HEI who will offer their services during and after the end of the project

Objective 6: To outreach the three targeted groups by offering a support system via distance learning with tutorials and selected course programs on English for academic purposes, Hebrew/Georgian as a second language, research methods and academic writing to help students in these vulnerable populations to be successful

Objective 7: To contribute to raise awareness on the relevance of inclusive education and the project activities and results by involving NGOs representing the selected target groups in IL and GE and increase the number of prospective students from vulnerable groups willing to access HEIs

Objective 8: To implement continuous internal and external checks on project implementation and societal impact

Hitherto, partners considered they are making all efforts to guarantee the reinforcement and provision of support services aim four main areas (child care, clinical and occupational psychological, learning and physical disabilities, academic support) with special equipment and revised recruitment and retention regulations. In the downside, the development of distance learning programs have not yet started in most cases and therefore their contribution was rated the lowest among all the objectives.



## What partners liked and what areas have been identified for improvement

A summary of good practices and Key Areas for Improvement (KAIs) can be found in the table beneath

<p><b>Best areas identified</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cooperation with partners to promote students' inclusions.</li><li>• Learning skills for capacity building projects.</li><li>• Improvement methods and plans to approach target groups.</li><li>• Provision of key information and knowledge regarding the target groups to each institution. Structuring new plans for training and development tools.</li><li>• Raising awareness of the need for support services for students with disabilities and minorities. Management on plans and priorities with well based project and goals.</li><li>• Communication within the consortium.</li><li>• Participants' engagement in the project and commitment.</li><li>• Participants' willingness to take more responsibilities and suggest new initiatives.</li><li>• Development of awareness and understanding of the project tasks and their importance for the inclusive HE and society.</li></ul>
<p><b>KAIs</b></p> <p><u>At consortium level</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Less paperwork and more practical presentations.</li><li>• NGO's involvement in the project.</li><li>• Number of dissemination events (not enough).</li><li>• Conduct a scientific research conference, what will facilitate the sharing experience of the countries involved in the project with the disability students, ethnic minority students, students living in conflict regions.</li><li>• Sharing the experience related to DARE target groups in European universities. Got acquainted with the EU university environment, the academic environment, with the services of this type of students (students with special educational needs, socially unprotected, national minority students, migrants, etc), their teaching methods and curriculum.</li><li>• Define assessment tools for support services.</li><li>• Lack of cross-package overview – each work package is self-contained.</li><li>• Project web portal could be utilised more for internal dissemination of information to project partners.</li><li>• A better thought-out monitoring questionnaire.</li><li>• Lack of contingency plans. Implementation of training may not be sustained by all universities.</li></ul> <p><u>At institutional level</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improving the awareness and involvement of students with disabilities and minorities on campus.</li><li>• Improving plans for sustainability of services (future budget resources).</li><li>• Making different faculties and units at the University more involved in the project.</li><li>• Number of trainees (some partners would like to cover big number of university academic and administrative staff).</li><li>• Problem of adapting distance learning courses due to Georgian legislation.</li><li>• Low level general knowledge on disability groups (mental disability). It seems, the project has to admit that Israeli and Georgian HE and societies have some differences on inclusion issues, particularly - on the</li></ul>

inclusive HE. The reasons of this could be different understandings prevailing in societies of these two countries, at the same time - significant differences of the economical situations, etc. As a result, Israel and Georgia at present are on rather different stages of the developments of inclusive HE. Therefore, our partners from these two countries have different possibilities to reach DARE project's tasks.

- Rational ratio between soft (human) and hard (material) means necessary to improve the access to and quality of inclusive HE for minority ethnic groups, women in disadvantaged situations and in peripheral areas and disabled students in IL and GE.
- Training of train faculty members, professional and administrative staff on the use of the established or reinforced services for vulnerable target groups.
- Purchase and run equipment and resources needed to improve and develop the different target group.

### **Cooperation within the consortium**

The assessment of cooperation between the partners is very positive. There is full information transparency and full availability for all project matters. The project environment is very creative and there is openness to ideas. University of Haifa has successfully created a culture of collaboration and engaged involvement of the consortium members. The coordinator has a formed vision related to the project management mechanisms, which contribute to the effective management of the project. Allegedly, cooperation with the leader is intensive and helpful.

Georgian partners have a constant connection to each other and share information with each other at all times. They act synchronously in the main issues. DARE project contributed to the cooperation between the Israeli partners involved in the project regarding to the access of higher education of the target groups. The project has laid the foundation for the origin of new ideas and implementation. However, cooperation between Georgian and Israeli partners should be strengthened nevertheless. Certain gaps regarding the projects main goals and how to deliver them were observed. This could be fixed by joint project tasks in the future. As some coordinator put it the cooperation is very limited. *"The joint work between the partners can be improved. They are very communicative, expressing their thoughts, wants, requests. They also fulfil every request but there are problems with deadlines sometimes"*.

The cooperation between EU partners and beneficiary countries is also very satisfactory. EU members in the DARE project have contributed to the implementation of activities and deliverables within the different work packages and working teams in a very collaborative manner. They tend to reply quickly, get things done and bring their own voice and ideas to the project.

In terms of financial management, distribution of funds has been very satisfactory with no major issues. At institutional level, specially in Georgia, there is a concern on the use of equipment. So far there is a significant delay

in the purchase of hardware which could impact negatively on the approval of the intermediate report since the consortium needs to spend 70% of the first instalment. Most equipment has been ordered but invoices have not been provided yet.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The first year of a project is always difficult as everyone is learning new things and trying to get to grips with the issues and challenges in different partner's countries. One of the issues addressed is the lack of horizontal communication of work package development. This is the consequence of a project with many different work packages, each working in its own silo. Some partners would desire more cross-communication across work package leaders and also among Georgian and Israeli partners. Despite the good work done by the coordinator, cross-information should be enhanced.

Another suggestion is to already create advisory boards involving NGOs and representatives of stakeholders representing target groups. Dissemination of the project and activities in development should be enhanced henceforth.

Equipment should be purchased and included in inventory as soon as possible and preferably before the mid-term reports. There have been reasonable delays, but further delays will have a serious impact on the project implementation.

Last but not least, it would be convenient to develop a contingency plan in each institution as a way to prevent future risks. Among them for example, we could cite the motivation of trainees (or lack of it) and difficulties with logistics using the new infrastructures. There might be cases that new student services are located in areas with difficult accessibility.

Participation of partners in the report

Institution	Status of questionnaire	Activity implemented
Haifa University		questionnaire
Masaryk		questionnaire
KTU		questionnaire
UM		questionnaire
EAN		questionnaire
Gordon		questionnaire
SSU		questionnaire
TESAU		Questionnaire & interview
Zugdidi		Questionnaire
Sakhumi		Questionnaire
Sapir		Questionnaire
Achva	Delayed	Reminder 7.11
ISU		Questionnaire & interview
UAIC	Delayed	Reminder 7.11