



**DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR ACCESS OF DISADVANTAGED GROUPS OF PEOPLE AND REGIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION  
ERASMUS+ CBHE 561547-EPP-1-2015-IL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP  
INTERNAL QUALITY MONITORING  
ERASMUS + DARE PROJECT  
FMV Report of QA team: Findings and Recommendations**

**Authors:**

Prof. Gaspar Ros, UM  
Ms. Mee Fong Lee, EAN  
Prof. Ovidiu Gabrilovici, UAIC  
Prof. Martin Vrubel, MU  
Prof. Palmira Juceviciene, KTU  
Dr. Rachel Pear, UH

**June, 2018**

### **General comments on findings for GE and IL partners:**

The QA team was struck by the richness of the project's implementation. Although we had heard the reports of partners at the Consortium Meetings, it was very different to witness it with our own eyes and meet a plethora of stakeholders and beneficiaries. The following is our summary of what we observed at each location.

QA visit to **Georgian (GE) Partners:** March 12-16, 2018

DARE members part of visiting team:

- Prof. Gaspar Ros, team leader, specializing in QA and quantitative assessment
- Prof. Ovidiu Gabrilovici, specializing in psychology and qualitative research
- Ms. Mee Foong Lee, specializing in expanding access to HE for minorities
- Dr. Martin Vrubel, specializing in special education and students with disabilities
- Dr. Rachel Pear, liaison between QA team and partners
- Not present, advisor: Prof. Palmira Juceviciene

### **ILIA STATE UNIVERSITY (ISU)**

ISU focused on the target groups of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (including learning difficulties) and students from ethnic minorities. They built capacity in their institution in the three areas: student support services, staff training, and blended learning.

A large accomplishment was the development of a self-assessment tool, by a specialist trained through DARE, that was used by more than half of the University student population to establish that there are students with learning difficulties in Higher Education, a fact that had not been fully accepted in GE.

The terminology of "difficulties" instead of "disabilities" is used, and the 'social' rather than the 'medical' model is applied, as there is no direct diagnosis but rather self-assessment. This change in terminology also may help policy change and ease the students, staff and policy makers in the directions of accommodations and support for students with learning difficulties.

ISU is working with stakeholders to establish a Consultation Centre for SEN to provide screening in order to offer emotional and psychological support in addition to academic accommodations.

ISU has committed core staff for the Consultation Centre in development, and additionally, plans to remove all physical barriers by 2022.

In terms of working with their ethnic minority students, ISU acknowledges that DARE has created a vehicle for them to think about methodology in theory and practice. A conversation with Prof Merab Basiluiu and two students expressed the appreciation for the training offered in DARE.

ISU itself provided a training session for all the other DARE GE partners on SEN. ISU has additionally acquire equipment through DARE to produce clips of student success stories to encourage minority students.

It has engaged in extensive outreach meetings which has resulted in significantly increased the number of applications from non-native Georgian speaking students.

Giga Khositashvili created the blended learning course, "Techniques in Academic Writing" after experiencing the training at the 4th DARE Consortium Meeting in Zugdidi where UH Shay Spieler presented on e-learning.

## **IAKOB GOGEBASHVILI TELAVI STATE UNIVERSITY (TeSaU)**

TeSaU's TG is ethnic and religious minorities and it aimed to facilitate their integration and success at the University. TeSaU has found DARE to be instrumental in bringing the issue of disability to the forefront.

DARE was used again at TeSaU in training faculty, building online learning, and offering new student support services. Through DARE TeSaU has:

- Administered the SEN screening tool developed by ISU to help identify students with LD and changed their accommodations for examinations offered to these students.
- Created new courses to supplement the assistance given to non-native Georgian speaking students, offering Georgian, English, Russian and general aptitude.
- Worked with the student government to help increase the participation of ethnic minorities in student activities to promote integration.
- Developed and implemented the first blended learning courses that their university has never had.
- Begun to adapt infrastructure to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

The QA team met with students, faculty members, administrators, and attended the blended learning course, in which students were creating their own websites, in addition to visiting the other computer labs and observing the equipment installed with proper Erasmus+ DARE stickers shown.

## **SHOTA MESKHIA STATE TEACHING UNIVERSITY OF ZUGDIDI (ZSSU)**

University of Zugdidi is a regional university near the border of Abkhazia and about 50% of its students are internally displaced persons (IDPs) – refugees who fled Abkhazia after the 1992-3 conflict. There are also those who have remained in Abkhazia crossing the border in order to study at the University. Zugdidi's DARE programs also target women (students with children) and students with special needs (SEN). DARE has resulted in attitudinal change within the institution, and it now sees these students as a 'resource' – an investment for the University – rather than a 'burden'.

The QA team met with Rector, Prof Teona Khupenia, in addition to staff and students and saw the Life Long Learning Center created with the DARE equipment.

Due to DARE, ZSSU created individual learning plans for the students who need them e.g. adjusted timetabling to enable them to attend classes.

The institution also decided to provide a nursery for students to leave their children while they take exams (although the equipment for the center was not bought with DARE funds as originally planned in the proposal as it was deemed ineligible early in the project).

Additionally, audio/video versions of lecturers are now available to those who are not able to attend regular lectures.

The DARE Lifelong Learning Centre entailed a restructuring and merger of three former units – to centralise previously fragmented support services for career counseling, foreign language learning, and technological learning.

As an example of the impact of the project, DARE has influenced Prof Teona Khupenia's vision for the next seven years to develop a QA strategy relating to both lifelong learning and internationalization.

## **SOKHUMI STATE UNIVERSITY (SSU)**

SSU's DARE target groups are: students with learning difficulties; internally displaced persons (IDPs); and ethnic minorities.

Like TeSaU, in order to supplement the national 1+4 programme which they have found insufficient to meet the needs of minority students, SSU has also created a free DARE programme offering slightly different components: Georgian, English and computer skills (4 times a week) that take place in the DARE computer classroom as well as other University spaces. This programme has proved to be popular with students from all the 7 faculties in the University. SSU has already committed the funds to continue this program due to its success in the pilot stage.

Since DARE started until the FMVs, 26 academic staff and 20 support staff have been trained to support the target students. In addition, 100 students have also participated at the training. Further training is planned for Student Support Services staff.

Since DARE the SSU Rector is more engaged with students and has provided new financial support. The University's 2018-2021 strategic plan has been infused with the DARE ethos and SSU has made a commitment to apply the QA Loop to its accreditation process.

SSU's DARE 'Psychologist Cabinet' offers psychological support to vulnerable students. The Cabinet has helped students not just in boosting or restoring their confidence, but also in resolving issues that otherwise would have prevented them from attending classes by engaging with their parents, e.g. the family of an Azerbaijan student tried to stop her from studying. Two autistic students who received support finished their studies and are now working at the University. According to Izolda Bukhuleishvili, so far the Cabinet has helped 20 students who would otherwise have dropped out.

Additionally SSU used the tool developed in DARE by ISU to identify the students' needs and it is now mandatory as from September 2017 for all first year students.

QA Team Visit to **Israeli Partners**: April 9-12, 2018, same Team as GE visits

### **UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA (UH)**

The QA visit to the UH included meetings with students, staff, and administration as well as a tour of the writing center. DARE was initiated by Prof. Hanan Alexander at the time when he was the Dean of Students. DARE has considerable impact across the University, in providing support for the target groups, including in its work on changing the accommodations allowed to students with disabilities so that now any need can be accommodated.

One of the most significant accomplishments of the DARE project is the reorganization of a Student Support Unit in the Dean of Students Offices that provides ALL support services in one place as opposed to spread throughout the university.

The QA team heard from DARE local coordinator Kalanit Kleemner and her team that this restructuring has included addition of staff, including a native Arabic speaking advisor, and changed collaboration and interaction to create the teamwork necessary to provide students with their needs.

A writing center has also been developed as part of the project and proven to be so successful that the university has committed to build a second one in the library.

The QA team spoke with students, including Ahmed, a 3rd year student studying Human Resources and Arabic, and Hadi, a Druze, studying Computer Science. Ahmed participated in the Bridge to Employment programme and is now volunteering in Tamla Village on access to higher education, acting as a counsellor. Hadi learned about DARE and its focus on the importance of education through Eyad Kizel, coordinator of an Academic Leadership Program for Druze. Hadi would like to publicise DARE services available at Haifa University more extensively in Druze villages to encourage others to study.

The team learned that these programs have also proved successful and are continuing and expanding, including through an award from the Joint Distribution Committee to expand the internship program.

### **GORDON ACADEMIC COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (GACE)**

DARE at GACE focused on the LEAP program which helps women over the age of 30 earn a degree and get into the workforce. This program is led by Avital Hecht and has already produced impressive success stories, such as the woman featured in the DARE project video. GACE had tried to help this population in the past and had a program for women over the age of 30 years which was not successful as most students (75%) did not receive the minimum grades that they needed to enter into the regular study program. The only program they could enter into was one that was to be certified to be an assistant in pre-school institutions, which is not an academic program.

Gordon College's DARE team used the opportunity of the DARE program to design a new program called LEAP. LEAP provided a 5 day a week study structure, including a support day and assistance for this age group that had not previously been offered. GACE pre-piloted LEAP in the first years of DARE and fine-tuned it throughout the project in order to arrive at a system for student support services that sufficiently served this population and offered proven results of its success in comparison to previous program. With DARE's LEAP program, around 95% of the women who participated in the program received the minimum grades required to enter in the regular program.

An important finding was the DARE technology room, integrated into LEAP and the QA team visited the room to see the equipment installed, labelled and used. The QA visit began with a visit to the President of GACE Prof. Taler who spoke with the team regarding how the DARE project is very much in line with the goals of the institution and that it has pushed GACE further to new paths. GACE is ahead of the curve regarding making their building accessible to people with disabilities and in hiring a larger percentage of people with disabilities than the Israeli law requires. DARE has allowed them to extend this agenda in the LEAP program.

### **ACHVA ACADEMIC COLLEGE (ACH)**

ACHVA used DARE to build the innovative “Be” Simulation Lab, which functions both to supplement Student Support System for target groups as well as to train staff and faculty. This being the only simulation lab in the south of Israel, there has been the spin-off effect of many other groups gaining interest in using the lab. This in turn has made Achva a hub that can offer innovative services to many populations, such as school principals and psychologists-- thereby clearly showing how capacity was built within this institution through DARE.

During the visit the QA team used the lab, met with students, faculty, and administrators-- including Dr. Ety Grobglad, who originated the idea for the lab, Dr. Heidi Flavian, who oversaw its implementation, as well as the President of the College. The Simulation Lab is based on the understanding that different people learn differently, and not only allows students with special needs to learn in other ways, but also allows lecturers and pedagogy trainers to gain alternative teaching strategies. It is a learning area where learners participate in pre-organised learning situations that relate to their field of learning. The Lab offers the opportunity for students to learn differently by integrating a variety of channels and stimuli, including an ‘observation room’. By the end of each learning phase each student can view himself/herself and reflect on their work. The Lab is also used to help students go through mock work interviews and otherwise prepare them for entering the workforce. Dr Michal Revivo, Dean of Students, was off campus during the visit but made sure to relate her perspective on DARE to the QA team. She said that having a capacity building project that focused on accessibility enabled her to make changes in her institution that she had wanted to make but could not find the leverage to be able to do so. Now Achva has used the lab as a resource in successful applications to the Joint Distribution Committee to continue to develop and create further services for the TGs of students with disabilities and minorities. Furthermore, the success of the lab has triggered Achva to build other technological spaces currently under development.

### **SAPIR COLLEGE (SAP)**

The QA team met with students and the DARE team at Sapir in the accessibility center, where they were able to see the laptops bought through DARE that students use, and also visited an accommodated English course in progress that helps students with learning difficulties gain their degree.

The team also learned more about the large policy effort that SAP is coordinating as a major aspect of its DARE activities. It was at the DARE kick-off meeting in Murcia, Spain, that Ariella Hellwing, head of the accessibility center at SAP, learned that students with disabilities are not funded by the government in the same way that other target groups, such as minority students, are funded. This spurred her to build a coalition of Deans across Israel and join with the Israeli Students Union to change this—and they have already brought the issue all the way to the Knesset.

SAP has also used DARE to enhance their work with SAMAN, a student union that specifically includes students with disabilities, to lead awareness campaigns across campus. Students

named Maya and Eden spoke to the QA team about their involvement and Ariella's mantra in all of her accessibility work of "nothing about us without us" was thereby experienced.

**General comments on recommendations for GE and IL partners:**

At each institution, the QA team sat with the local DARE team at the end of the visit to offer feedback.

It was underlined to all partners the need to focus on the documentation of the work and the collection of evidence.

It was also indicated to update the Field Monitoring Protocols to reflect their work in all pathways of the project including Student Support Services, Training, and Online/Blended learning and to upload these to the Achievement section of the website.

The visiting team also further suggested that they create a repository of supporting documents for these successes, such as for instance: documents and photos from events, sign in sheets, strategic plans or any other documentation that gives evidence of the activities performed as part of the project.

The QA team was very glad to hear at the 6<sup>th</sup> CM in Haifa that these suggestions were continued or implemented, and that plans were being made to make an additional area on the website specifically for sample supporting documents for the final report.