

NEWSLETTER NO.1

Develop Business and Economic Research Centers Capacity at Palestinian
Higher Education Institutions (BERC), contract no.
561966-EPP-1-2015-1-PS-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

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DISCLAIMER

BERC PROJECT

Develop Business and Economic Research Centers Capacity at Palestinian Higher Education Institutions (BERC), Contract no. 561966-EPP-1-2015-1-PS-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP is a project that has been funded with support from European Commission, within ERASMUS + programme coordinated by the Islamic University of Gaza, IUG for the period of October 2015 till October 2018. The project has consortium of 8 universities and IUG : Royal Institutes of Technology (KTH) (Sweden), Laquila University, (Italy), University of Almeria (Spain), University of Huddersfield (UK), Al Azhar University of Gaza (AUG), Birziet University (BZU), University College of Applied Sciences (UCAS) and Al Quds Open University (QOU).

“KICK OFF MEETING ”

The Faculty of Commerce at the Islamic University of Gaza organized the kick off meeting of the project to develop the capacities of Business and economic research centers in higher education institutions in Palestine BERC. The kick off meeting was organized in the 21st and 22nd of March, 2016 jointly in the Gaza strip hosted by Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) and in the West Bank hosted by Birziet University (BZU) where they were connected via skype. Partners from Gaza strip including: University College of Applied Sciences (UCAS), Al Azhar University of Gaza (AUG), and Al Quds Open University (QOU)- Gaza branch attended the meeting at IUG. QOU- West Bank branch and university of Lqauila as well as Dr. Nidal Jayyousi- the director of Erasmus Plus office in Palestine participated in the meeting at BZU. EU partners from Royal Institutes of Technology

(KTH) and University of Huddersfield (HUD) participated in the meeting via skype. In the early stage of the event, each partner gave brief about the institution tht he/she presented. Then the project coordinator summarized the Project objectives, Time Lines, Work Packages (WP), Deliverables, budget and the responsibilities of each partner. In addition, the project coordinator presented the project grant management and E+ CBHE guidelines in managing the project grant. Furthermore, all partners presented a self- assessment of the as-is situation of their institution practices and capacities in managing the economic and administrative research. In this meeting the partners set the policies of communication and the future activities.



SECOND MANAGEMENT MEETING

Islamic University of Gaza, in cooperation with PS partners, conducted the second management meeting of Developing Business and Economic Research Centers Capacity at Palestinian Higher Education Institutions (BERC), on Wednesday, June 29, 2016.

The attendance including, the project management team of IUG, representatives of project coordinators from AGU and UCAS- Gaza. Also from West Bank through Skype Technology the coordinators from BZU and QOU. From EU and the UK, the coordinators of UNIVIQ, UAL, and HUD, as well as KTH were attended the meeting.

The coordinators discussed three main issues: they revised the implemented activities and they suggested feedback. In particular the main feedback focused on the results of the needs assessment conducted by the project PS partners. The main feedback was related to the matrix of assessment as seen below :

- Recruitment academic staff
- Teaching vs Research
- Quality assessment
- Training
- Research policies and regulations
- Areas of interest
- Research problems
- B&E Research Centers
- National scientific research Economic and Business plan
- Sustainability (research funding)
- Scientific research efficiency
- Scientific research effectiveness

The second issue was related to the future activities that are expected to be completed in next 6 months. The third issue was related to the comparison between the actual activities that have been completed and planned activities, the latter was about the tender for the purchase of equipment for the project. At the end of this meeting, a list of future activities and recommendation was produced and the next management meeting agenda was also conducted.



THIRD MANAGEMENT MEETING

With the participation of the project consortium the 3rd management meeting was organized at KTH – Sweden and at IUG for Gaza partners in the 24th of Nov. 2016. The agenda of this meeting included the revision of the implemented activities and the main feedbacks in addition to the future activities. The main discussion of this meeting was related to bridging the gap between EU partners and PS partners. The discussion also focused on the content of the future of training modules in Italy, Spain and the UK. For Italy and Spain the training Module will be on April and May 2017. The training Module of UK will be on September 2017. The PS partners will initiate the criteria of selection of the trainees. The partners also agreed to arrange workshop to suggest the content of the training modules. The partners also discussed the equipment of research Center according to the EU standards.



FIRST TRAINING WEEK VISIT TO KTH

The 1st training visit in the BEREC project was hosted by Royal Institute of Technology ((KTH) Sweden for the period from Nov. 21st till Nov. 25th, 2017 in the field of scientific publishing and networking with participation of the Palestinian partners from the BZU and QOU and IUG. Whereas Gaza strip participants including IUG project management team, faculty members along with a representative delegation from scientific research affairs of Gaza Strip universities, namely: Al-Azhar University, University College of Applied Sciences, Al-Quds Open University, Palestine Technical College in Deir al-Balah, and Science and Technology College in Khan Younis were connected to the training events via skype. During this event each EU partners in particular KTH conducted many workshops and training session related to the networking and publication. Many international experts in this field were presented to share their experience with PS partners.





UNIVERSIDAD DE ALMERÍA



University of
HUDDERSFIELD



Università degli Studi
di L'Aquila



KTH ROYAL
INSTITUTE OF
TECHNOLOGY



الكلية الجامعية للمعلوم التطبيقية
University College of Applied Sciences



جامعة بيرزيت
BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY



NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The 1st work package in the project is to start with identifying the main needs and gaps in the organization and implementation of business and economic research at the Palestinian Universities. University of L'Aquila and IUG were the leader of this work package with participation from all project partners. Needs assessment matrix was prepared by L'Aquila University, and applied at different PHEIs, The needs analysis phase identified the gap between the standards of research quality and implantation of those standards. The needs assessment started directly after the kick off meeting in the 22, March 2016 and completed in the 29th of June 2016. In the light of analysis, the EU partners produced the following gaps: Recruitment academic staff:

- Research is becoming a key factor for the Higher Education in Palestine, even though teaching activities are still predominant.
- Recruitment of staff is done on the base of academic titles (preference to PhD holders).
- Experience in teaching in the degree field, research performance in terms of quantity and quality, coherent work experience and other skills connected with the multifaceted role of a university professor.
- For the progression in career teaching and research attainments seem to have the same weight even though quality of scientific production is increasing its importance in the recent years.
- The gender balance cannot be evaluated since, among the 5 universities, there is one with a great majority of female, three with a great majority of male and another with a balance. ·
No link with labour market .

Training

- Enhancement of research skills through specific training is not foreseen at institutional level.
- Some training courses are delivered but with a very limited focus.
- There is a trend to develop the competence and skills to carry on research in an international environment.
- The approach to research starts with the preparation of the Master thesis where the student, almost in autonomy, decides the topic and develops his/her own methodology.

Teaching Vs Research

- The weight of Research vs Teaching varies in the 5 institutions even though teaching is prevalent in all.
- In the last three years the scientific publications concern mainly: articles in peer reviewed journals and Proceedings of Conferences, Books and chapters of books.
- The cooperation with societal stakeholders is little but the support from industry, even though indirect is increasing.

Research Problems

- Research problems are identified by staff in autonomy following personal interests and trends of national/international scientific communities but partially also for the exploitation/application of research findings.

B&E Research Center

- Only two universities have a Research Center (IUG and QOU) as part of the university structure
- No full time (or part time) staff appointed by the institution for running BERC.
- Affiliated researchers work in those structures in support of the university staff but the organizing of the activities is considered inadequate for the expected results.
- All the universities consider the establishment of such center fundamental for the development and improvement of research quality and quantity. · The urgent actions should be: Providing training for enhancement of Research performance and results. · Establishing scientific links with international scientific community.
- Establishing international teams of researchers and promoting mobility programs.

National Scientific Research E&B Plan

- No budget available for national Scientific Research level
- The Universities receive the funds for research and have autonomy in deciding the selection criteria of proposed projects. (no intervention from Government) · The Rectors and specific committees have the task to select the proposals and to assess afterward's the results. · The assessment criteria are coherent with those generally used: sustainability, impact, international relevance.

Research Policies and Regulations

- About the specific field of B&E there are no hints or special plans decided at national level
- Each University/Faculty decides the priorities and the criteria for funding research
- The revision of these criteria is not regularly performed so the research carried out by the staff is not always coherent with the policies decided by the institutional Committees.
- Furthermore the performance in research activities is not a key factor for decided progression in career.
- The load of teaching activities is considered too high and prevent a continuous and deep involvement in research
- In any case funds for research are considered not sufficient to develop a policy at medium term enabling to attain results with a concrete impact on society.
- No specific staff is recruited for research.

Scientific Research Efficiency

- The researchers need support in preparing and submitting research projects proposals, in managing projects and creating international networks.
- Therefore a unit or center to perform these functions, in cooperation with international entities and private sector partners would create the right environment for a self-sustainability required for this effort to continue and develop.

Scientific Research Effectiveness

- Selecting problems based on the society needs;
- Establishment of special bodies for leading staff towards real societal problems, through more active engagement of societal stakeholders
- Organization of conferences and workshops at university level;
- Directing students, in their graduation projects, to investigate urgent needs of the Palestinian society.

Funding and Financial sustainability

- Funds for research are a small part of the total budget of the universities.
- Furthermore the extra funds obtained through the implementation of projects is not in general reinvested in research but becomes part of the university budget. Main Recommendations:
- Capacity building in qualitative and quantitative methods
- Increase the number of experts for the preparation of the proposals;
- Establishing B&E research centers;
- Enhancement of staff capacity to raise funds from industry and society and to create relevant networks;
- Focusing better on applied research.
- Initiate Strategic plan for research centre ·
- Amend the policies of research ·
- More liaison with labour market

The expectations from the establishment of Research Centers at Palestinian HEIs are very high. The BEREC project can start the process and establish a programme of urgent activities that those Centers should do. A detailed and targeted training course for the staff appointed for the Centers should be delivered as basic premise for the other project activities.