



LASER – LANGUAGE ACADEMIC SKILLS AND E-
LEARNING RESOURCES

An EU Higher Education Project run by the British Council in Jordan,
Lebanon and Syria

LASER – LANGUAGE, ACADEMIC SKILLS AND E-LEARNING RESOURCES

- A three year project funded by the European Union
- Targets Syrians and disadvantaged Jordanians - those who have experienced higher education and those who have not
- Combines language and academic skills courses with online learning pathways
- Works with organisations already in the field to reach audiences of young people aged 18-30
- Students supported by facilitators in managed learning centres run by partners

- **Reach at least 3,100 displaced Syrians of higher education age in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria**
- **Provide language learning and academic skills classes in English, French and German**
- **Provide online short-courses through MOOCs in English (Futurelearn) and in Arabic (Edraak)**
- **Facilitate online, accredited higher education distance learning through Open University and Amity University for 350 students**

So how has LASER progressed since its inception?*

The English component:

- 900 Students have registered for English classes in Jordan in the initial 6 month period (Amman and the North – including Za'atari)
- 2200 students will need to register over the next 18 months to achieve the target of 3100 students
- They are mostly studying at an A2 (elementary speaker) or a B1 (intermediate, independent speaker) level
- Classes were initially advertised through Facebook but the focus is now on outreach through community partner organisations
- Initial experience shows that learners would benefit greatly from travel payments or per diems, as participants are often under great financial stress

*** LASER began in September 2015**

Operational Structure of LASER

Team Leader (British Council)

Jordan Education Initiative

CARE

Norwegian Refugee Council

TAGI-UNI

Online Manager (British Council)

FACILITATORS



Online Higher education– progress so far:

FACILITATOR TRAINING:

- Took place in January – using a train-the-trainer model
- Online materials will be developed to support cascade training (training portfolio)
- Importance of Facilitator role becoming clearer - during training, Facilitator's role was refined at three levels:
 - 1. Learner support level** – provide effective support to learners including encouragement, coaching and technical support
 - 2. Administrative level** – class attendance, data collection, problem identification, project evaluation and use of Google Docs to record information
 - 3. Project level** – being part of an online community created and managed by the facilitators

LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT MODEL

MEASURES:

1. Create a research-based learning and engagement model to support decisions being made so that these can be used as guidelines for other Higher Education Emergency contexts.

- This is a **live document** to be updated throughout the duration of the project

2. Create a pilot with a smaller cohort of accredited learners to refine processes, approaches, methodologies, forms - to allow for and plan, the implementation of the larger cohort in September

3. Research the role of the Facilitator – InZone (UNIGE) and develop throughout project

Pilot cohort

- Accredited courses were advertised in December closing in early January (approximately 50 applicants)
- Neither OU nor Amity considered academic excellence as prerequisite
- Committee of 4 went through applications

Criteria included:

- 1. Administrative** – 18-30 / Syrian or Jordanian /
- 2. English ability** - Aptis – B2 or IELTS 5 (Open University), Aptis B1 or IELTS less than 5 (Amity University); Aptis below B1 or IELTS less than 3.5 – recommend MOOC
- 3. Qualifications:** High school diploma, HE attendance or completion, no documents – request evidence to showcase academic skills
- 4. Essay:** demonstrating clarity, critical thinking, family support, positive approach

Pilot cohort

Second stage selection –

- a) Phone interview (to assess English ability and family support)
- b) Face to face interview with selected applicants.

	Open University	Amity University
Selected cohort	13 students (3 to start Professional Management certificate in April)	11 students
Current cohort	11 students (2 dropped out formally) courses began end January	8 students (one student leaving for Canada, another currently studying and a further student, didn't have a high school certificate.)

- 32% female, 68% male
- Small cohort to facilitate project learning – 330 registered (Sept and Jan)
- Provided personal attention, encouragement
- Online learning community set up to support learners

What have we learnt?

Commitment:

- Students were applying for scholarships simultaneously
- several dropouts at the start
- **MEASURES:** Students sign a Learning Agreement
- hold a 'Start of the Year' ceremony
- Induction training
- Personal support /communication
- Advocate for online learning

Language, academic and technical skills:

- students lack IT skills and adequate levels of English
- Are not used to working alone, lack organisational / academic skills
- **MEASURES:**
- Induction training to include basic IT skills
- Online community to reinforce skills and behaviours

Learning Centres:

- Delays in the signing of partner contracts posed risks for implementation
- Participants not all in formalised spaces with equipment and internet access
- **MEASURES:**
- Online Learning Manager - active in supporting students
- TAGI-UNI - access to their Learning Centres for students

Selection criteria:

- Time constraints: selecting the balance (330 students) may prevent the selection procedures used with pilot cohort
- **MEASURES:**
- Administrative procedure introduced to cut out those not meeting age and nationality criteria
- Certificates up front (Amity University)

MOOCS AND SPOCS (Small, private online courses)

- Began in March
- Students with specific interests will enrol directly in MOOCS in real time
- Other students will be supported through group-run SPOCS in English and in Arabic
- Student can enrolled in a Futurelearn Course (Exploring English)

A survey is being run to determine areas of interest

- 149 responses in 24 hours!
- Initial responses indicate that English MOOCs are more popular than Arabic MOOCs



Taken from an application essay:

'...Talking about living things and how they move and function is extremely fascinating to me. How organisms work and live together and how they interact with their environment are, indeed, fundamental questions and I think that all people have the curiosity to know the answers of those questions. Therefore, learning about these things can help human beings with their environment and to take better care of the world in which they live, because the more we learn, the more we appreciate everything around us.

However, being without the physical presence of teachers and other peers might be monotonous and boring a little bit, but I will do my best to keep my enthusiasm and willingness to learn and remain motivated by developing goals, making plans, and creating a specific schedule in order to make my time more exciting. ..

After graduation I hope to continue studying for a Masters' Degree and then a PhD in biology. Afterwards I plan to work at a university and start my research on a large-scale.

Rawan Alahmad (Open University student)*

**With permission*