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## REACT – Kick-off Meeting: final minutes

Time: Monday, 30.04.2018 (09:00 – 16:00)

Place: NOKUT, Drammensveien 288, 1327 LYSAKER

**Participants:** Stig Arne Skjerven (NOKUT), Marina Malgina (NOKUT), Einar Meier (NOKUT), Erlend Bern Aaser (NOKUT), Silvia Bianco (CIMEA), Katrien Bardoel (NUFFIC), Theresia Strümpfel (KMK), Angela Lambkin (QQI).

### 1. Welcoming and practical information

- Stig Arne Skjerven (ENIC Bureau President) welcomes everybody to NOKUT and explains the importance of the REACT project for the current work on recognition of refugees' qualifications in Europe.
- Marina Malgina explains that the objective of today's meeting is to agree on how the work ahead should be organised, including the dividing of work tasks and financial and administrative clarifications. In addition to planning ahead of the June-meeting in Rome.
- Brief introduction around the table of the participants that are part of the project team and the current work they are doing at their respective institutions.

### 2. Presentation from the offices about their work:

- **Silvia Bianco (CIMEA):**
- Started two years ago to issue statement of comparability free of charge.
- Have issued more than 200 statements, mainly from African countries. In addition to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Iraq.
- Have initiated training courses for HEIs on LRC and Italian legislation.
- Tested the background paper and named it academic pass. Mostly concerns refugees with secondary school.
- Interviewed 11, issued 9 academic passes.
- Want to pass on the expertise to the institutions responsible, therefore started involving HEIs actively at an early stage.





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- Part of EQPR pilot project, which will be continued for the next three years.
  - Have used the refugee country briefings in their work actively (from Toolkit 1).
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- **Theresia Strümpfel (KMK):**
  - Number of applications from refugees are going substantially down. In 2016 almost half of the refugees came from Syria, now it is at 25%.
  - Two main activities: 1) individuals applying directly to get statement of comparability, 2) Expert assessment for other recognition authorities.
  - Statement of comparability has seen a substantial increase since 2015.
  - The peak for Syrian applications is over. Remains high for statement of comparability, but going down for expert assessment advice.
  - Three-step procedure: 1. verification of legal residence category (asylum status), 2. plausibility check of educational biography (HEIs are struggling to know how to do it). 3. Verification of alleged HE access / admission qualification by quality based test procedure.
  - Status for applications without documentation: from 2015/2016 it has been going up, and then suddenly going down in 2017/2018.
  - Applicants are now start to get ahold of more documentation, even those from Syria.
  - Plausibility check of the educational biography – this is where the REACT-project can help.
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- **Katrien Bardoel (NUFFIC):**
  - Since 2015, all third-country migrants can apply for credential evaluation free of charge in the Netherlands.
  - Expansive increase in applications from 2015-2018. Over half of all applicants are Syrian refugees.
  - Special procedure for those without documents - Education Level Indicator (ELI): compromise of details about educational and professional background. Looks similar to normal statement, but specified that evaluator have not seen documents.



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- Noted that NUFFIC does not do verifications.
  - Receiving more and more questions about ELI from HEIs.
  - Developed toolkit for admission of refugees without documents in cooperation with HEIs institutions (same three-step procedure as KMK): because of such different procedures at the institutions.
  - Dutch law allows admission of people without documents by HEIs, as long as procedures are transparent.
  - NUFFIC has never actually observed how the Toolkit has been put into practice in HEIs – this is their angle in the REACT project.
  - Will join EQPR from the second phase starting this year, and do pilot in Netherlands.
  - Challenges for refugees: basic language training are free, but they need to meet a higher level for admission and does not get additional funding for this.
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- **Angela Lambkin (QQI):**
  - Completely at the beginning when it comes to assessing refugees qualifications
  - General public can get their recommendation online, free of charge. Automatic procedure. People get a standard comparability statement, placing the qualification in relation to the Irish qualifications framework.
  - Statement is not legally binding. Within the statement it is a note that it is up to the employer or HEIs to further evaluate the qualifications of the refugee.
  - Worked with specific countries after the refugee crisis in 2015, to adapt to new situation.
  - Until get official refugees status, cannot engage with HE-system. They have access to english language programs and other activities, but in a small scale.
  - Looking into the formal pathway with HEIs. University of Limerick wish to become particularly involved.
  - Also looking into cooperation with NGOs.



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- **Marina Malgina (NOKUT):**
- Section of recognition works with document-based assessment. Refugee section works with interview-based assessments.
- Proceed about 8000 applications from individual applicants a year.
- Not status of refugee or not that decides the treatment they receive, but status of documentation.
- Interview based procedures: about 200 applications to proceed yearly. 120 UVD-interviews, results in legally binding decision. Interviews with both NOKUT and experts from Universities.
- 2015 and 2016: saw a demand with those who could not go through interview with experts because of not meeting formal requirements.
- Established Qualifications Assessment for Refugees (KV), which builds on the EQPR methodology. Not legally binding, but a statement.
- Since 2005: long history of developing and adjusting the special recognition procedures for refugees.
- Demand for systematic approach, resulted in pilot project in 2012. This resulted in the UVD-procedure (systematic approach).
- Taking part in the EQPR-project.
- NOKUT is also part of the MERIC-Net, REFREC and VINCE projects. Currently in the reporting phase of the Toolkit 1 project.
- The refugee country briefings, made in Toolkit 1, have been received as useful by several actors.

### 3. Project overview and work packages

Marina Malgina provides a general overview of the project and the different work packages (WPs):

- React is an Erasmus+ project running from 2018 to 2020.
- The proposal which was submitted got a high rating in the evaluation of the application (90/100).
- It was positively received that REACT is instigating a cooperation with HEIs.





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- Goal of the project: Development of efficient, fair and transparent recognition procedures across the EHEA.
- Participants: project group, steering group and HEIs. These actors constitute the consortium of the project.
- The project is divided into 9 work packages, starting from April 2018 and completed in January 2020.

### WP 1 & 2:

- Making a call for tender which targets specific HEIs to take part in the project.
- NOKUT will make a contract with each institution.
- All project partners agree to contact individual institutions ASAP.
- Einar will send contract proposal ASAP to project group.
- Marina will distribute a sales pitch to the project partners, which are to be distributed to HEIs. This should be adapted by project partners to their national context.
- We do have funds for another meeting, dedicated to HEIs. Will if necessary ask for budget amendment.
- Solution: invite HEIs for three meetings instead of two. One of them taking place in late November.
- Re-defining the June meeting in Rome: identifying the challenges and current procedures for admission of refugees for the HEIs involved.
- Training will take part in the November-meeting. This meeting is to take place the 26th of November in the Hague.

### WP3

Meeting in June in Rome (@ CIMEA)

- Participants: steering group, working group, available HEIs.
- Presentation of HEI procedures, initiatives, reflections.
- Comments and responses from steering group – presentation of initiatives.
- Questionnaire to HEIs.
- Report after meeting.





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### WP4:

Marina Malgina proposes to continue with template of the previous country briefing..

- This is agreed on by all project partners.
- Agreement to make country briefings on: Iran, Somalia, Venezuela, Ethiopia, DRC.
- It is noted that we already have briefings of these countries: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Irak, Libya and Syria.

Distribution of countries:

- NUFFIC: Iran
- KMK: Somalia
- QQI: DRC
- CIMEA: Venezuela
- NOKUT: Ethiopia

### WP5:

- NUFFIC have experience with webinars and will take on the responsibility of the development of the platform and the format of these e-learning modules.
- These platforms will build on the ones used in the previous project.
- The webinars will be about the five countries in focus for the country briefings.
- The partners responsible for the each country briefings will be responsible for the content of the webinars and the presentations.
- Discussion over having a streaming solution of some kind, or stick the webinar solution used in the previous project.
- Katrien will discuss the possibility to use a streaming platform with colleagues at NUFFIC.
- Have the webinars ready by December 2018 and presentation of the different modules in January 2018.



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### WP6:

- Testing of the toolkit to take place between January 2019 and Juli 2019.
- How many testings? Not defined in the project description.
- More detailed planning to take place at the meeting in November, so that we can do testing in January.
- Testing to take place in cooperation with project partners. Partners can choose how to communicate and assist the HEIs, based on what suits the different project partners the most.
- NOKUT will be subcontracting the institutions.
- Differences in the autonomy of the HEIs in the different countries: this will make it necessary to adapt the testing to the local context.
- NOKUT will make a report-template. This is to be used by the participating HEIs in reporting back to NOKUT of the testing experience.
- Important to clarify what refugee qualifications are about: how HEIs understand this terminology.
- Ask the HEIs what kind of applications they receive. Based on these applications, what kind of questions do they have?
- NOKUT will develop a questionnaire to be distributed to HEIs
- Experience: difficult for HEIs to implement procedures on their own. A need to develop a systemic, overarching, approach. Should therefore develop best practices and provide this to HEIs.

### WP7:

- After testing: identify best practices.
- Arrange an online meeting to develop recommendations.
- Include both project team and steering group in this process.

### WP8:

- Compilation of e-learning modules.
- CIMEA will be responsible for the technical platform.
- Discussion: NUFFIC and CIMEA is more or less responsible for some of the same technical activities.





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### Other comments and discussions:

- General comments on the contents of WP9, WP10 and WP11. It is noted that we need to include another work package for the HEI seminar in November.
- Presentation of the website: (<https://www.nokut.no/en/about-nokut/international-cooperation/erasmus-projects/refugees-and-recognition/>):
- NUFFIC notes that the name written for NUFFIC on the website (EP-NUFFIC) should be changed to NUFFIC.
- Dissemination template is to be sent to the different project partners.

### 4. Quality assurance:

Marina Malgina notes that the project is divided into into three periods with subsequent deadlines:

- 1) Period A: 01.03.2018 – 31.12.2018 – deadline for reporting is 15.01.2019.
- 2) Period B: 01.01.2019 – 31.08.2019 – deadline for reporting is 01.10.2019
- 3) Period C: 01.09.2019 – 29.02.2020 – deadline for reporting is 15.03.2020

### 5. Administrative matters:

- Einar presents requirements for auditing and documentation which must be submitted to the project coordinator (NOKUT).
- The project has an eligibility period (March 2018 – January 2020). All expenses to be covered by grant money must be made in this period.
- NOKUT subcontracts HEIs: will be responsible for the 25% subcontracting costs.
- Budget: NOKUT cannot apply for additional funding.
- NOKUT will need to see the payslip for each participant involved and copy of all receipts.
- Any conflicts here with GDPR? All handling of documentation must be handled in accomodation to GDPR.



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- Subsistence costs: EU per diem rates have been used earlier. Would be better if all project partners follow their own guidelines when it comes to these costs.
- NOKUT would like to provide pre-financing to the project partners: 40% pre-financing and rest to be paid when project is completed.
- General agreement on the proposed solution.
- Wide powers (mandate) in the contract is given to the project coordinator.
- Discussion over what kind of services that can be included in the budget and how this can be organised in practice to fulfill the requirements in the grant agreement.
- Discussion over transferring of pre-financed funds: Einar will send information to the project partners.

