

## From **T**heoretical-**O**riented to **P**ractical Education in **A**grarian **S**tudies

**ERASMUS+ CBHE 585603-EPP-1-2017-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP**

EXTERNAL EVALUATION MID-TERM REPORT

CM CONSULTING

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the mid-term evaluation report is to verify independently that partner organisations, and the project structures thereby developed/implemented, follow the general rules and the standards of the Erasmus+ programme. The external evaluation is part of the *Quality Plan* as described by the Quality Committee. The goal of this assessment is:

- to provide recommendations to all the partners of the TOPAS project about main decisions taken so that the quality of their work is reinforced;
- to gauge the contribution of each individual team/partner in contributing to the overall implementation of the project;
- to provide each partner and the European Commission with sufficient visibility on the consortium and its practices that support a culture of quality

It is worth noting that the scope of the external evaluation is exclusively associated with the TOPAS project and affects all partners belonging to the TOPAS consortium and other stakeholders participating in the project. It covers at this stage only the organisational and managerial aspects of the project. The external evaluation is a tool of good practice to verify that the project is taking the right measures in order to achieve the project objectives and deliverables as originally planned.

The quality of the TOPAS project may be addressed from two different angles, both leading to meeting the targeted 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 cost-efficiency aspects), 'doing the right things according to the working plan.

The goals of the external evaluation are to:

- Provide an external assessment on the implementation 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

In order to conduct the external evaluation, we took into account the entire project documentation available on moodle, a questionnaire distributed to all project coordinators and a monitoring visit to the project coordinator, HSWT in Triesdorf, March 2019. The questionnaire format has been adapted to the TOPAS context from previous versions used in other similar projects. At this stage only some elements of DAC criteria are being considered (Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency). Impact and sustainability will be assessed more in detail by the end of the project.

Institution	Status of questionnaire	Activity implemented
HSWT		Monitoring and interview
WUC		Questionnaire
WUELS		Questionnaire
UASMV		Questionnaire
ANAU		Questionnaire
YSU	Delayed	Questionnaire
SNAU		Questionnaire
NULES		Questionnaire
Samarkand Agricultural Institute	Delayed	Questionnaire
Andijan Agricultural Institute	Delayed	Questionnaire

Elements to assess:

- 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.
- Efficiency/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 identify 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.

## **RELEVANCE**

Relevance according to the DAC criteria refers to the extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor. In evaluating the relevance of this project, we have concentrated on the following four elements to see to what extent the objectives of the program were supported.

A first sub-indicator is the contribution towards the Erasmus+ and the validity of TOPAS added value towards the programme. Herein, the overall aim of TOPAS is to consolidate the partnership with farm industry to provide reliable farm data which can be used for both academic and business purposes.

A second sub-indicator is related to the management of the project. Towards this end it is important to analyze the management performance within the consortium and the opinions of both grant holder and project partners. Are the activities and outputs managed in the project consistent with the intended impacts and effects?

A third variable is the implementation of program objectives with special emphasis to cross-cutting issues like equal opportunities and gender balance. One of the program objectives would be to promote internships to students from third countries, especially from vulnerable groups, selected on the basis of academic excellence, to obtain qualifications and/or experience in the European Union as well as female population since Agrarian studies and agricultural engineering is a traditional male dominated field of study.

## ADDED VALUE

Coordinators from partner countries confirm the relevance and importance of the project to innovate both in education and in farm practices. The project will provide practical training in real working environment and better match between job market needs and the qualifications offered thanks to the involvement of farms in curriculum development. The process receives formal support from the Ministries of Education. This is more evident in the case of Ukraine, with active involvement of Ministry of Agriculture. Placements to be organised during the second half of the year should be used to improve the professional competencies of the students.

The activities organised within WP1 serve to facilitate the transition from teacher-oriented education to student-centred practice-based education. The project contribution to enhance employability and cooperation between universities and agriculture enterprises through adequate internship schemes with government support is very satisfactory in the case of Ukraine and satisfactory in the case of Armenia and Uzbekistan. In these two countries, it is important that new Governments and Ministries recognize formal and informal learning and endorse formally EQA.

When interviewing farms and students from Armenia at HSWT, the model developed in Germany is indeed a good case and practice to be transferred into third countries but adapted to local conditions. Internships in Europe by third country students should generate beneficial spin-offs and synergies after their return – in terms of knowledge and skills.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE and DISTRIBUTION OF TASKS

The project management structure of TOPAS should guarantee an efficient and well-balanced decision style, where all of the sub-units 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.

Executive management unit composed of the project coordinator and the regional coordinator, NULES.

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. All partners have created local teams.

Steering Committee: 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 leaders 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 TOPAS project as a whole. The work package leaders are 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	Revision of internships and Learning Outcomes from BA and MA agrarian management programs	WUELS
2	Revision of internships and Learning Outcomes from BA and MA agrarian management programs to implement practice-based education	WUC and HSWT
3	Internal Quality control and monitoring	SNAU, YSU and AAI
4	Dissemination	UASVM assisted by NULES, SAI and YSU
5	Project management	HSWT assisted by NULES

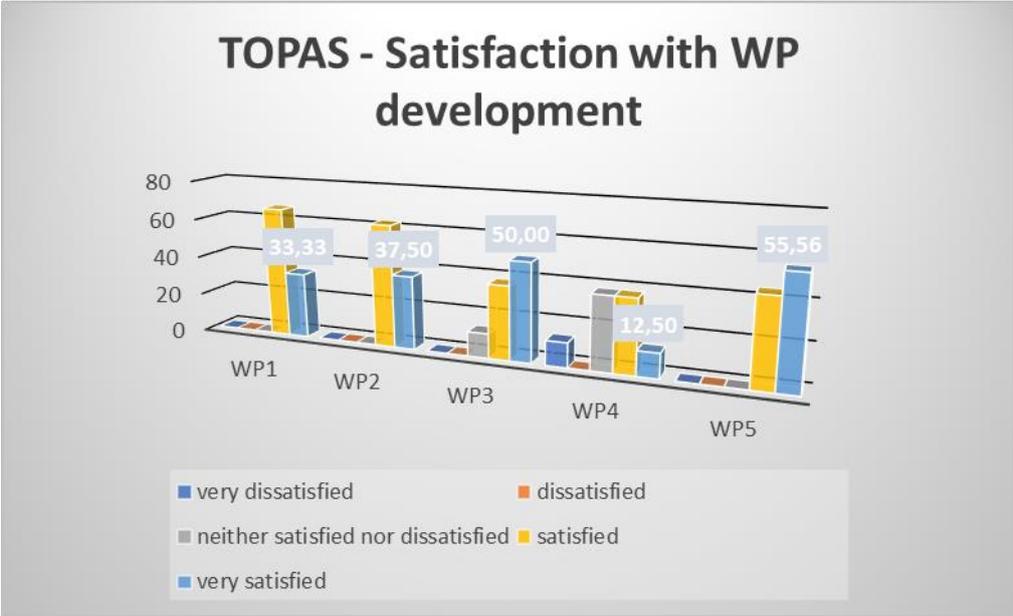
### Analysis on Work Package Implementation

Work Package	Comments
WP1 PREP	The slight changes in the consortium have not impacted negatively on the activities and deliverables of this WP. European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships (EQA) has been used instead of ECQUIP given that the former deals more directly with apprenticeship and placements in broader fields. ECQUIP is mainly used for medical and veterinarian internships. EQA helps young graduates to make transition from education to the labour market. Early labour market experience such as internships and apprenticeships are useful to facilitate youth access to labour market, to ease the transition between

	<p>education and employment and to develop labour market relevant skills. Both EQA and ECQUIP are legally valid when formalising the relationship between enterprises, universities and apprentices.</p> <p>Other changes, for example, related to partners like YSU which did not receive authorization to deliver programs in Agricultural studies. Nevertheless, all partners participated in all activities of WP1 and contributed to the development of framework plans for internships (student placements) in the partner countries. The framework plan for Armenia still improves student placements through the second Armenian partner, i.e. the Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU), which is the sole Armenian HEI with a focus on agricultural studies.</p> <p>TOPAS partners have analysed current learning outcomes, stages of implementation, peculiarities of internships of agrarian management courses and compared models between 3rd countries and European experiences. Special attention was paid to analyze existing methodologies, practices addressing the achievement of learning outcomes and competencies and provision of internships in agricultural management studies. At SAI, due to the change of profile of the institute, together with target profile-farm management, internship program of another BA program “agriculture of feed crops” is being revised. At ANAU, NULES and SNAU the revised curricula have been approved and changes introduced in 2018-2019 academic year.</p> <p>The workshop on “Improving Data Availability” at Darmstadt opened the possibility of new ideas for future workshops on legal data issues, GPDR and legal use of agricultural data</p> <p>All partners were either very satisfied (33,3%) or satisfied (66,6%) with WP1. Results are illustrated in graph 1 at the end of this table.</p>
<p>WP2 DEV</p>	<p>The project follows this WP with training on distance learning key competences, competence-based approach and practice-based education. Use of new teaching tools &amp; methodology to implement practice-oriented education is being conducted. There were two workshops organised on Agrarian management courses at WUC November 2018 as well as at HSWT, February 2019 including MOOCs and computer assisted learning during an intensive 2-week training. During these workshops third country partners were able to analyse farm management practices in Europe. Partners in this WP have been occupied preparing MOOC videos, learning data analyses tool “Regiomax”, evaluating economic indicators of mechanization from KTBL data bases and learning innovation assessment methods, preparing portfolios of courses in Moddle and attending study visits to farmers.</p> <p>Each partner university chose modern methods of teaching which they need to update regularly.</p> <p>At SAI, purchase of equipment was postponed due to change of official name of institute and related procedures.</p> <p>Coordinators highlighted the clarity and transparency in the organization of students’ selection procedure for training and the high level of organization in conducting the training.</p> <p>Participants have been fully engaged in the trainings. We infer that satisfaction from trainings would be reflected in internal monitorings or surveys. One negative aspect was that the organisation of the WUC training was held back by slow information concerning the change in focus of the program which ultimately led to some colleagues and all students from Uzbekistan not attending.</p>
<p>WP3 QA</p>	<p>The activities for internal quality assurance (QA) have been implemented from the beginning of the project and will accompany all activities. A quality plan was developed and available in the Moodle platform. It includes a formative and summative evaluation and the production of two reports (mid-term and final). All Results of QA are presented on the homepage: <a href="https://erasmus-topas.eu/project/publications">https://erasmus-topas.eu/project/publications</a></p> <p>The QA plan covers all WPs as well as indicates the expected deliverables and target groups. The indicators of progress and how they will be measured are correctly indicated. Updated programs including stages of integration of QA system Internal monitoring for internship scheme in Uzbekistan HEIs for Agrarian management courses.</p>

	<p>50% of coordinators said to be very satisfied with the development of WP3.</p> <p>The quality of teaching methods, placements and data collection is something that will be needed to be analysed during the second half of the project.</p> <p>One recommendation would be to differentiate and separate the communication plan, the management plan and the quality plan. Herein, they are all merged in one single document. There is no evidence of conducting risk assessments at this stage although this would be part of WP5 not WP3.</p>
<p>WP4 DISS</p>	<p>Dissemination seems to be the the weakest point of TOPAS. Before the meeting at WUC the dissemination was not sufficient (poor web-page, many universities did not have any articles about TOPAS etc.). Efforts have been done recently to collect all information. It would be recommended to follow the European Commission guidelines like indicated in "European Research – A Guide to Successful Communications" where in order to ensure a successful Dissemination strategy, the following actions must take place:</p> <p>Define the objectives of the strategy  Target the audience  Define the message(s)  Select the appropriate tools  Plan the program</p> <p>It would be recommended to follow other good examples of dissemination plans. For example, a good practice project promoting social media is: "Improving web strategies and maximizing the social media presence of LLP projects – Web2LLP" - <a href="http://www.web2llp.eu">http://www.web2llp.eu</a></p> <p>We note that the main platform for posting all news and relevant information about TOPAS is the Project web-site. It is acknowledged that it was created rather late, by the end of 2018. Therefore, dissemination process has been negatively affected. Nonetheless, a significant increase of activities within this WP has occurred in 2019 (after the meeting at WUC and discussion results of NEO monitoring in Armenia and Ukraine). Partners have been publishing TOPAS materials in official website and also in local newspaper. Partners have created banners and NULES distributed a brochure for the project. Local versions can be found as well (in Armenian, Russian and Ukraine).</p> <p>It should be adequate to consider a preliminary dissemination plan at the beginning of the project together with other management tools (communication plan, management plan, quality plan).  An additional problem reported was some commercially sensitive video footage appearing on social media without permission of company – which was subsequently corrected.</p>
<p>WP5 MNGT</p>	<p>We would like to pinpoint the transparency in communication and planning within the project management of TOPAS.</p> <p>Partner coordinators praised the timely creation and high level of management of the Executive Management Unit composed by HSWT and NULES.</p> <p>It has been observed the convenience and efficiency in communication between all partners through the Moodle platform. The financial management and financial transparency within the consortium are very sound. All decisions are taken in a collaborative way. For instance, given the changed role of YSU, there will be a shift of money towards other partners, upon agreement by the EACEA. YSU will hold a smaller role in QA and other transversal WPs like focusing on the advancement of data base structures for data on agriculture. This way the project benefits from YSU's expertise on the technical IT level and its knowledge about building technical interfaces between the different sources of data (i.e. YSU will keep the part of funding for equipment in computer hardware that is required for the software development)</p> <p>Some problems occurred also due to national legislations. In Uzbekistan, due to policies</p>

with new Government, public institutions could just open recently accounts in foreign currency. This is under operation at both AAI and SAI for project purposes. Likewise, by fiat, AAI has been converted into Andijan branch of Tashkent State Agrarian University. Political decisions also affected SAI which has been renamed as Samarkand Veterinary Institute. Third country partners have formed qualified project teams. They are actively connected to TOPAS online platform. Overall speaking, all partners were either very satisfied (55%) or satisfied (45%) with the management of TOPAS.



**CROSS CUTTING ISSUES**

Although there is not a formal gender balance policy established, equal opportunities are offered within the consortium. Nevertheless, in terms of gender balance there is a predominant male participation at management level despite the regional coordinator being a female. Roughly 70% of participants in teams are male and 30% female. Still, it is good to observe that there are female members in all third country teams.

**EFFECTIVENESS**

Being at a middle phase of implementation, one of the aspects that needs to draw our attention is the contribution insofar of the partners towards the main objectives of the project. According to the original Logical Framework (LFM) there were 5 main objectives to reach:

Objective 1 Revision of course assessment and learning outcomes (LOs) on Agrarian Management programs based on competence-based models which will be subsequently supported by adequate internship practices.

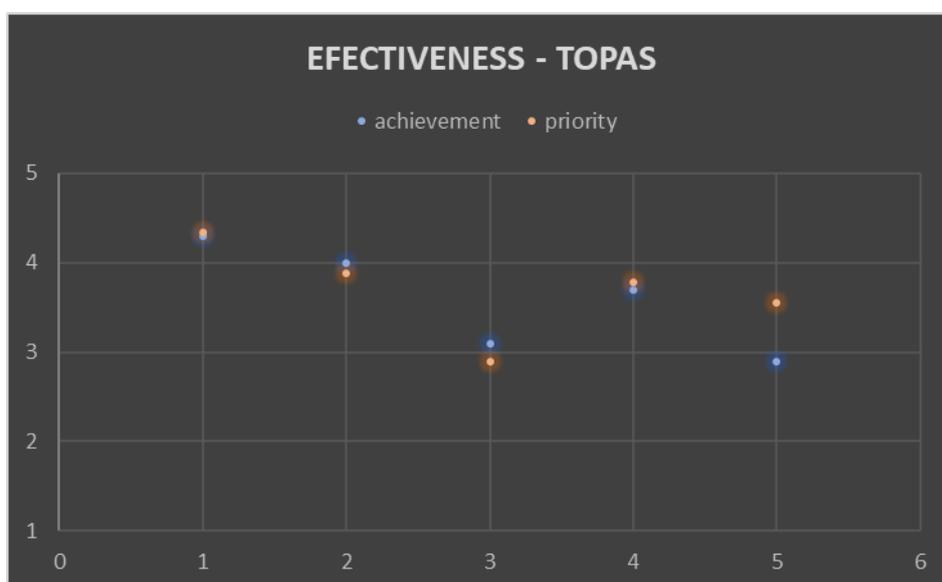
Objective 2 Intensive teacher training program targeting particularly new generations of teachers and professors through tailor-made program in the use of case-studies, problem solving methods and assignments and use and development of interactive videos and massive open resources.

Objective 3 Capacity building and formation of supporting staff to monitor and administrate internship schemes according to EU models.

Objective 4 Raising awareness of practiced-base education as a model for increasing cooperation with farm industry and enhancing employability

Objective 5 Use of internship data collection for further research activities, educational and farm policy guidelines

We try to identify the relationship between the achievement of the objectives and their positioning in terms of priority. We can infer from the graph below that objective 1 is the most important one and it has been nearly achieved. Conversely, objective 3 is the more undervalued but it has been achieved to some extent. Moreover, the use of internship data collection is an important objective that has not been achieved yet, mainly due to its link with activities that will take place in the second half of the project.

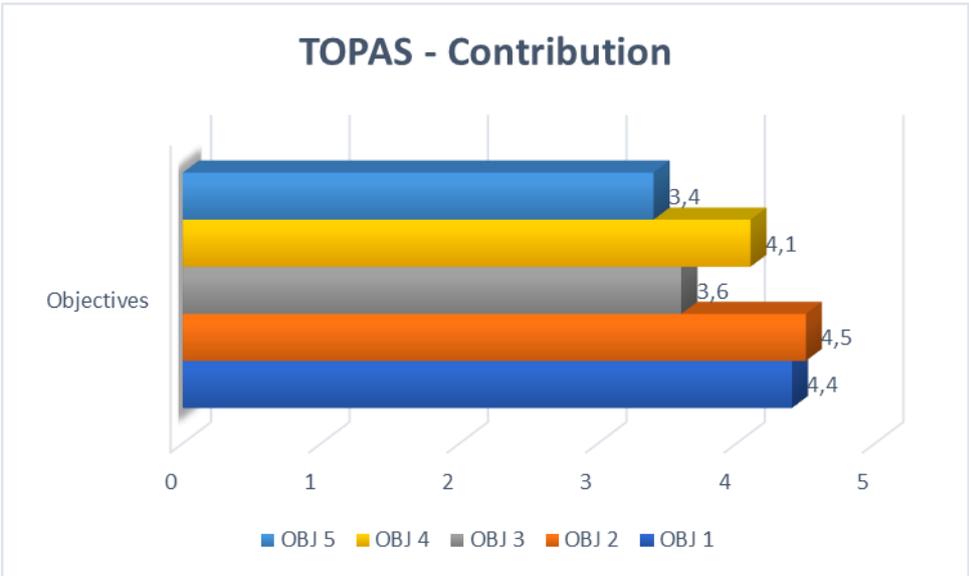


In terms of contribution to the project objectives, efforts have been done to achieve all project objectives. The project coordinators follow closely the workplan indicated in the project proposal as well as the goals and indicators reflected in the LFM. It has been observed a strong cooperation within the consortium, although naturally the impact in each country has been highly influenced by external factors out of the control of the project (changes in government policies and institutional decisions by Ministry of Education in Uzbekistan and political

instability and uncertainty in both Armenia and Ukraine). One positive factor is the close connection of NULES with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. In order to collect reliable and sustainable data 4 Ukrainian agriculture universities are part of a national pilot project. The initiative will give path to standardization of farm data for the country. Impact at national level. Networking. In March meeting with farms and 42 heads of agrofarms. Farm data based on TOPAS model may be considered a blueprint for the country.

In both Armenia and Uzbekistan, there are more challenges to achieve the expected results. In Armenia there is a lack of involvement at Ministry level, it lacks a dual system and farms size are smaller. It would rather difficult to motivate farms to participate in practice-based education without support of Government. Uzbekistan presents a similar case, although there is stronger formal links between universities involved and farm cooperatives. There is a formal engagement by the Ministry of Agriculture although it lacks a clear strategy about how to collect data and what data should be collected.

If we contrast the opinions of the coordinators regarding their contribution towards the achievement of the above-mentioned objectives, the individual contribution is thought to be higher for objective 1 and 2 and lower for objectives 3 and 5.



**Cooperation within the consortium**

One of the factors that increase or decrease the effectiveness and efficiency of activities within the project is the cooperation of partners within the given consortium. Herein, the assessment of cooperation between the partners is rather very positive (see graph below). There is full information transparency and full availability for all project matters. The project environment is very creative and there is openness to ideas to implement practice-based education and improve administration practices although this also involves the acceptance of project outcomes by University administrators. HSWT has successfully created a culture of collaboration and engaged involvement of

the consortium members. It is important to acknowledge the fact that many of the partners knew each from previous projects (TEMPUS) and thus a climate of trust was already created from the beginning. The coordinator has a formed vision related to the project management mechanisms, which contribute to the effective management of the project. According to the partner members, as we explained in WP5, cooperation with the project coordinator has been very satisfactory.

The regional coordinator has also an important role in the project. Where it seems to be lacking some communication is with Armenian and Uzbek partners. Nevertheless, Moodle platform and email facilitate a constant connection to each other so that shared information is provided at all times. The project has laid the foundation for the origin of new ideas and implementation. However, cooperation between third country 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.



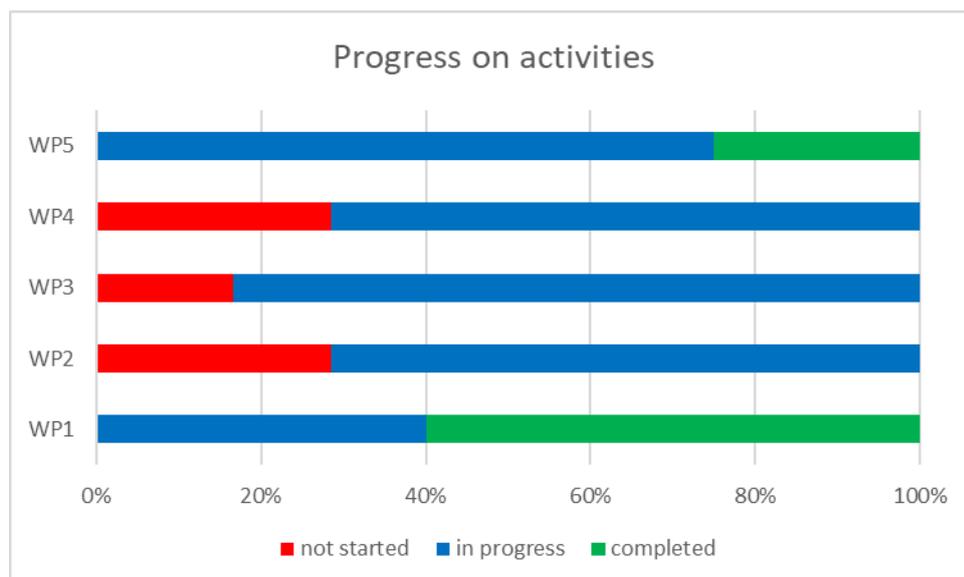
## EFFICIENCY

Efficiency according to the DAC methodology measures the outputs—qualitative and quantitative—in relation to the inputs. While effectiveness refers to the achievement of project objectives, efficiency refers to the use of resources toward the achievement of those project goals. Ideally, this generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs, to see whether the most efficient process has been adopted. When evaluating the efficiency of a program or a project, it is useful to consider the following questions: Were resources used? Were the number of foreseen trainings implemented? Were objectives achieved on time?

## ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED

At this stage we have reviewed the different activities implemented and no substantial deviations were observed except the development of a dissemination plan and the introduction of improved placement schemes in partner

country institutions which would start in September 2019 instead of 2018. An illustration of work on progress within TOPAS is shown in the graph underneath.



## QUALITY ASSURANCE

To improved the efficiency of the project, the following elements were identified:

Focal areas	Documents	Procedures
Orientation to QA	<p>Internships program for Agrarian management Bachelors course</p> <p>Questionnaire providing teaching QA has been distributed among students</p>	<p>Revised internships program</p> <p>Quality document provided after every meeting.</p> <p>Results of the questionnaire implementation were discussed after meetings</p>
Preparation of internal QA system	<p>Quality Plan of the project available</p> <p>Evaluation criteria for internships</p>	<p>Quality plan revised</p> <p>Evaluation criteria for internships validated by QA experts</p>
Implementation of internal QA	<p>At institution or department the following activities are being carried out : Evaluation of internships of Agrarian management Bachelors course in Agribusiness and investments Department</p> <p>SWOT analysis</p> <p>Project progress surveys which can be found</p>	<p>Evaluation of internships of Agrarian management Bachelors course in Agribusiness and investments Department in April 2019</p> <p>According to the QP of TOPAS the so called Base-line study of the project has been done in two parts: one assessing the qualitative responses by stakeholders (analysis report of the baseline questionnaire) and one</p>

	<p>in Moodle platform</p> <p>At NULES or SNAU they have to produce an annual report of QA and each quarter work team analyze the Project realization and the presentation of results</p>	<p>assessing the administrative records – The baseline administrative list.</p> <p>Three project progress surveys have been prepared. Conducted regularly by the QM team, they enable evaluation TOPAS progress and delivery by gathering open and anonymous opinions of project partners (the personal data is optional).</p> <p>The quality of the developed materials is provided by discussion at the meetings of the working groups, the department and the academic council of the faculties involved in partner country institutions.</p> <p>Likewise, each institution has a department that is responsible for internal QA for accreditation purposes.</p>
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#### USE OF THE GRANT

While the implementation of QA and delivery of activities is satisfactory, regarding the use of the grant, the project has serious deficiencies to correct. None of the categories has reached 70%. Staff costs stands at 69% of maximum allowance, then travel costs at 49% and costs of stay at 33,3 %. Equipment has only used up to 28% of the resources. Herein, it is very good practice to spend at least 50% of equipment of the first instalment in first year of project. We understand that software and online data banks are foreseen for later stage. However, all hardware could have been already purchased. Only 1 institution, SNAU, has declared equipment and only 2 partners (HSWT and SNAU) present reasonable use of the grant.

Budget Headings	1. Grant Awarded (in EUR)	2. Budget Spent (in EUR)
1. Staff Costs	295 158,00	102 005,00
2. Travel Costs	128 405,00	31 710,00
3. Costs of Stay	296 400,00	49 440,00
4. Equipment Costs	171 000,00	24 004,35
5. Subcontracting Costs	87 000,00	3 500,00
A. Grant for Project Activities	977 963,00	210 659,35
B. Additional Grant for Special Mobility Strand	0,00	0,00
Total Grant requested from the European Union (A + B)	977 963,00	210 659,35

DISTRIBUTION OF THE GRANT BY ORGANISATION (in EUR)									
Partner N°	Name of Partner	Country	PR/PA	1. Staff Costs	2. Travel Costs	3. Costs of Stay	4. Equipment Costs	5. Subcontracting Costs	Total Costs (in EUR)
P1	HSWT	Germany	Programme Countries	39 024,00	2 830,00	4 440,00	-	3 500,00	49 794,00
P2	WUC	United Kingdom	Programme Countries	5 350,00	1 645,00	2 160,00	-	-	9 155,00
P3	WUELS	Poland	Programme Countries	9 546,00	1 915,00	1 560,00	-	-	13 021,00
P4	UASVM	Romania	Programme Countries	8 948,00	1 885,00	2 760,00	-	-	13 573,00
P5	NULES	Ukraine	Partner Countries	8 450,00	4 130,00	8 880,00	-	-	21 460,00
P6	SNAU	Ukraine	Partner Countries	15 979,00	3 715,00	8 880,00	24 004,35	-	52 578,35
P7	ANAU	Armenia	Partner Countries	3 783,00	3 940,00	7 920,00	-	-	15 623,00
P8	YSU	Armenia	Partner Countries	2 833,00	3 750,00	6 120,00	-	-	12 703,00
P9	SAI	Uzbekistan	Partner Countries	2 899,00	3 280,00	2 280,00	-	-	8 459,00
P10	AAI	Uzbekistan	Partner Countries	5 213,00	4 640,00	4 440,00	-	-	14 293,00

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

The innovative aspect of the project for beneficiary countries is the use of Massive open online courses (MOOCs) for teacher training in agriculture management studies and also the supply of teaching resources that are practice-oriented. Another innovative aspect of TOPAS is the creation of a databank for applied sciences on the field of agriculture management for common use of students, teachers and researchers. This databank will consist of data on production inputs, costs and outputs of major cash crops of UZB, ARM and UKR. An added value for these countries is that EU partners have extensive experts with experience in evaluation of internships and assessment of learning outcomes.

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

### Best areas identified

- Project well embedded within institutional priorities (and national priorities) Cooperation with partners to promote students' placements and internships.
- Communication within the consortium.
- Participants' engagement in the project and commitment.
- Participants' willingness to take more responsibilities and suggest new initiatives.
- Project brings new approach to internship provision to students with innovative elements of matching LO of subjects, data collection, new applied teaching methods and orientation to applied education
- Comprehensive methodology of project management
- Possibility to discuss problems concerning to the QA

- Possibility to use MAX system for the Armenian, Ukrainian and Uzbek farms.
- Expanding network with international partners
- Strengthening of cooperation with Agribusiness
- Capacity building and formation of high-qualified academic staff for the practice-oriented education
- For Ukraine, a spin-off initiative of TOPAS supported by the Ministry of Agriculture - Ukrainian Farm Management Data project
- Increasing cooperation with farm industry and enhancement of employability
- Use of internship data collection for further research activities
- Exchange of experiences in agriculture management among EU and third countries (e.g. formal and informal sharing of good practice in teaching)
- Developing strategies for student centred learning in Partner Universities

#### KAIs (Key Areas for Improvement)

We can identify two levels in the identification of key areas for improvement

At consortium level

- Development of common guidelines for students on internships~
- Some coordinators preferred less paperwork and more practical presentations.
- Partners should find an easy method to agreeing on dates for meetings
- Project dissemination has been a weak area in the first half of the project
- Use of internship data collection for further research activities, educational and farm policy guidelines
- More active cooperation with other stakeholders. One of the weakest areas acknowledged by the coordinator is the involvement of associated partners. It is been noticed a slow reaction of farm industry to provide data concerning production output
- Facilitate the transition from teacher centered knowledge-based form of education to student-centered practice
- To foster employability in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia by enhancing the cooperation university-agrarian enterprises through adequate internship schemes

At institutional level

- Revision of course assessment and learning outcomes on Agrarian Management programs
- Problems with implementing project results into study programs.
- Acceptance of project outcomes by University administrators and managers
- Dissemination amongst other university staff not involved in the project

- Non completion of some of the project outcomes by some partners

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report we were able to analyse 3 of the 5 DAC criteria. The project is highly relevant for beneficiary countries and results are satisfactory at this stage. We would expect to see endorsement of equal opportunities and gender balance in the selection of students for internships during the second and third year. In terms of effectiveness and contribution of the partners to the project the results are satisfactory as well at this stage. Efficiency is a variable that needs to be tackled as soon as possible.

The first half of any capacity building project is always difficult as everyone is learning new things and trying to adapt with the issues and challenges in different partners' countries. One of the elements missing is cross-appraisal among Work Packages. This is planned to be conducted in second half of the project. It is important to link the results of WP1 with other WPs. It is important to monitor that work done in different work packages is not done parallelly.

Another suggestion is to make effective the already established advisory boards involving Ministries and representatives of stakeholders representing target groups (e.g. farms). The dissemination of the project and activities in development should be enhanced henceforth. In this sense, WP4 should be given particularly attention 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. Time-consuming national administrative procedures regarding tendering procedures and tax exemption are highly likely to slow down the project progress. As a result, keeping planned timelines would be less feasible. It should be a concern for the consortium that 70% of the first instalment has not been spent.

Last but not least, it would be convenient to develop a contingency plan in each institution as a way to prevent future risks regarding organisational and financial issues. Among them for example, we could cite staff turnover due to delayed staff costs payments, delays in tendering procedure, the selection of students (and costs of internships). Therefore, it is important to have shared overall information in management and project flow in details. Final versions of dissemination/ quality plan/ management plan should be available as well as products and results of surveys.

Stronger support from external key stakeholders should be targeted especially at HEIs in Armenia and Uzbekistan. Ministry of Agriculture and Education should be cooperating together to involve private farmers despite the contextual difficulties in these countries.

Other recommendations from partners themselves are the following:

- To open the possibility of conferring diplomas to master students involved in the process of training (in Armenia)
- To strengthen cooperation with partners in the future with developing new projects and events in educational, scientific and research approaches
- To enhance the cooperation between Universities and agriculture enterprises through adequate internship schemes with government support to recognize formal and informal learning.
- During all working meetings, there should be meetings with practitioners and study visits in agricultural enterprises.