

## **Arab and European Leadership Network in Higher Education (ARELEN)**

### **ARELEN UPDATE**

Welcome to the first edition of ARELEN UPDATE – a newsletter for universities in the Arab Region.

We start with a report of an important round-table meeting held in July to inform and support our response to the Covid-19 challenges.

#### **The Covid-19 Challenge 'Round table' - virtual discussion to prioritise needs 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2020**

##### **Introduction**

The Covid-19 crisis and the resulting lockdowns have affected the higher education sector in unprecedented ways. Students have gone home, staffing has been reduced, and many academics are now working from home. Even as lockdowns ease, campus life will not return to normal. Universities face multiple challenges to their income as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, including the probable loss of international students. With jobs scarce, domestic student applications are expected to remain steady in the short term, but campus life will not return to normal. Institutions will be under even more pressure to offer value for money. Although many institutions have already moved to online learning, a permanent shift could require a radical change of business model, with a broader customer base but lower fees. The long-term implications of the coronavirus crisis could be far-reaching. With challenges to the traditional pedagogy and finances shaken by the crisis, institutions need to rethink or rapidly restructure their operations.

The purpose of the round table session was to shed light on the challenges that are facing, and will face, higher education in the Arab world and the actions that would provide appropriate responses for the members of the Association of Arab Universities. Under these circumstances

the Arab universities in such a short time had employed their technical experience to further enhance their distance learning and online education platforms.

ARELEN plans to assist university leaders to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities which Covid 19 has created. To ensure that this is accurately informed ARELEN invited 13 rectors from Gulf & MENA countries and different types of universities to take part in a facilitated round table discussion via Zoom at 11:00 GMT on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 the outcome of which will inform one or more webinars on the key issues. The **purpose** of this round table session was to share experiences from participants on their priorities and identify the assistance which they would value from ARELEN. The objective of the discussion was to consider the wider opportunities as well as the shorter-term needs for recovery and the training and assistance that would be valued from ARELEN; as well to share the key issues facing participants within their universities and their current thinking about responses.

### **SUMMARY OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

The discussions were focused around the following topics:

- The major role universities have played in enabling society to deal with the virus; medically, socially, psychologically and economically.
- Limitations placed on the scope of on-campus provision.
- The need for distance teaching and learning
- The need for alternative reliable assessment methodologies.
- Remote leadership of staff and the continuation and development of the universities' service to society.
- Recruitment of international students as a consequence of travel restrictions and perceptions of students about the safety of various countries.
  - The future operation of universities and how it will be impacted in different ways depending on whether they are State or privately funded, small or large and the size of their financial reserves.
  - The financial consequences, and range of responses for universities which are privately owned and funded by tuition fees are different from those which are State institutions and subject to legal and national agreements concerning tenure.
  - The likely reaction of potential new students.

From the discussion, it emerged that technical barriers (especially in terms of standards, health and safety, recruitment, blended learning, internationalisation, stakeholder engagement, research relevance) exist but participants believed they can be restored or enhanced. Universities have an opportunity to make game-changing reforms. These reforms can be addressed within the current legislative framework although they require the investment of time and resources into identifying appropriate solutions including training and development for both leaders and staff members.

According to the participants, the most relevant barriers for universities are ministry regulations and precise QA requirements, restrictions on employment, physical accommodation Etc.

Participants were concerned about some key challenges that needed to be addressed. The need for training and adopting new practices in some areas like moving from operating individually to more collaborative working among universities and staff members in these areas as well as on the subject of blended learning with adopting modified approaches to ensure effectiveness. Some participants asked for more intervention due to the need to establish a design method for assessment that ensures accuracy and integrity. The need for training on risk management, scenario planning, information technology and leadership was stressed. Furthermore, participants said it is important to continue pushing for increasing the Higher Education sector's awareness and fostering a cultural change amongst students, public & officials.

### **Summary of priorities, including leadership development needs**

Firstly, the 'here and now', responding to current and potential future challenges in teaching and learning, finance, mobility, government legislations highlighting that the latter is could be more of concern to private universities than the public universities.

Secondly, the 'future' the role of the Universities to meet the societal needs in what is being defined as the 'New Norm' or the 'Post Covid-19' world, and the need to have 'fit for purpose' leaders to respond to the current and future challenges and enhancing intervention with students and incorporating new methods to meet the 'new' job market needs. Universities should work together to overcome these challenges as peers not competitors, highlighting that society looks up to us (Universities) and how can we overcome this challenge. ARELEN should work with university leaders and support them through these challenging times.

### **Investing in information technology and various virtual reality platforms and learning systems.**

This was one of the actions necessary to enable universities to operate successfully post- Covid which was identified at the top-level ARELEN Round Table event on 1 July.

To assist universities to do this successfully ARELEN has organised a webinar on September and will last for 1.5 hours.

The webinar will focus on how IT can effectively enable students to be taught, to learn, be assessed and engage with the university and how it can enable university staff to serve students well and continue to deliver innovations.

The webinar will feature examples of successful practice and will provide opportunities to raise questions and explore challenges.

If you have experience of IT innovations which have been of benefit to staff and students and would be willing to share these for 10 minutes via Zoom please send brief details to (Dana) by 16 August 2020.

**Summary of Expected outputs & activities:**

Overall expectation: Participants briefly discussed other issues, agreeing the need for the Association of Arab Universities through its sub-organisation ARELEN to address these needs on a Macro, Messo and Micro level through its future events.

Recommendations from ARELEN specifically: Recommendations for the development of regional strategies and action plans relevant to the objectives of universities strategies (priorities, capacity, standards, learning education, organization capacity building).

Stronger collaboration and coordination among universities and between each region such as demonstrable progress on existing joint initiatives and recommendations for new ones.

**Activities: work sessions & activities proposed following participants expectations from ARELEN as below**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activiy</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Objective</b>
September	Webinar	<i>Investing in information technology and various virtual reality platforms and learning systems.</i>	how IT can effectively enable students to be taught, to learn, be assessed and engage with the university and how it can enable university staff to serve students well and continue to deliver innovations.
October	On line webinar in collaboration with ARADO	Addressing the challenges that are facing the Arab universities in the light of the percussions of the covid 19 and the fourth industrial revolutions.	Enhancing the capacity of the Arab universities to create innovative solutions for the challenges faced by industrial revolutions and the percussions of Covid 19
November	The 5 <sup>th</sup> Annual PhD Seminar that is	International PhD seminar is suitable for all doctoral researchers (PhD and DBA students), as well as those who are planning to start	The PhD seminar 2020 focuses on reviewing works of candidates by the visiting Doctoral Advisors, external academic consultants, while providing

	organised and hosted by Varna University of Management./ Albena	their postgraduate studies. It is also suitable for Deans and Head of Research Departments as well as PhD/DBA directors	training, lectures, and individual sessions on topics such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surviving the PhD process &amp; planning.</li> <li>• Key issues in writing a research paper.</li> <li>• Qualitative, Quantitative or Mixed Method.</li> <li>• Writing an introduction and writing a literature review.</li> <li>• Advanced statistical methods.</li> <li>• Writing the final chapter.</li> </ul>
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Other News



ARELEN is very pleased to welcome Ms Dana Al Tabari who joined the team recently as executive secretary for the Governance and Advisory board. Dana is an accomplished projects manager with over 10 years of experience in the media markets. She's so efficient at her job that she rotated in different projects as writer, producer & director of international documentaries, feature films, live TV shows & advertising campaigns. Specializing in developing & exploring ideas for clients, weaving words and images into simple narratives

which talk to the right people.

She caters to major companies, non-profit organizations, and universities. She works well with corporates and can provide consultations for international corporations for organisational culture and H.R solutions.

More than her role as a project manager, she is also effective at persuading and influencing high-ranking organisations. Dana earned her MBA degree back on 2012 from Cardiff Metropolitan University back in 2013. Through her course, she developed a passionate interest in the programme designs and the needed skills for the contemporary job markets.

In particular, she focused on topics like sustainable development, self-empowerment, and leadership. After she graduated, Dana worked as teaching assistant in Arab Amman University teaching students Soft & Life Skills along with creative thinking and Entrepreneurship

Discussions are taking place with Advance-HE, the successor body to the Leadership Foundation in the UK with a view to collaboration on a webinar in the Autumn. More information will follow in due course.