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JAMIYA PROJECT

Evaluation of the Jamiya Blended Learning Course 'Applied IT Introduction to Programming in Java'

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1 Executive Summary

An evaluation of the course ‘Applied IT Introduction to Programming in Java’ was undertaken during the period 9 January – 6 March 2017. The evaluation included a visit to Jordan at the locations where the course was delivered, i.e. Za’atari Camp (delivered through the Norwegian Refugee Council —NRC—) and Amman (delivered through the Jesuit Refugee Service —JRS—). The consultant was impressed by the standard and amount of documentation provided in support of the review, as well as its clear and readable nature. The consultant found the honest and open engagement of the learners and academics involved in the course, as well as the Jamiya Project team commendable.

Students valued the personal development the course offered them and were particularly complimentary of the local tutors’ engagement. They also valued the possibility of following a course in Arabic and the fact that it was offered by an ‘established university’. Problems identified included, *inter alia*, limitation in access to the learning centre(s) and the pace of the course (particularly the online element).

This report makes a total of 7 commendations and 15 recommendations. These are identified in the body of the report. Given the consultative nature of this evaluation, none of the recommendations are binding as they would be in a statutory programmatic review.

2 Introduction

This is the report of the evaluation consultant, appointed by the Alexandria Trust to review the delivery of the pilot short course in a blended-learning setting ‘Applied IT Introduction to programming in Java’. The course was part of a broader initiative piloted by the ‘Jamiya Project’, currently being incubated at the Alexandria Trust, who provide administrative support and a board structure. Jamiya aims at providing Syrian refugee students relevant and accessible higher education by reconnecting them with Syrian academics, European universities and the latest education technology. This evaluation takes a critical look this pilot course, assessing its relevance for and impact on the intended beneficiaries. The evaluation also discusses whether the mode and level of delivery are fit for future courses.

2.1 Course rationale and logic

The course on ‘Applied IT Introduction to Programming in Java’ was initially intended to be, and designed as, part of a full 1-year undergraduate programme at level 6 on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), delivered through a blended learning setting and worth 7.5 European Credits (ECs) in the European Credit and Transfer System (ECTS). The course was available to Syrian refugees only, and was intended to address the predicament of the over 100,000 Syrians of university age who cannot access higher education courses because of the ongoing conflict in the region. A key rationale for running this course was to pilot the model of higher educational delivery in an emergency situation. This should provide valuable lessons for the provision of future higher education opportunities to refugee and other student populations at risk of exclusion. The course also wanted to provide a flexible platform to those students who, amongst other issues, face language problems and the challenge of not having all the necessary papers for enrolment in formal university outside Syria.

As described in the Course Description, this short pilot course is the result of Jamiya Project partnering with the University of Gothenburg and Edraak (Queen Rania Foundation). The course was delivered in a ‘blended-learning format’, which includes both an online and a f2f component. The course was facilitated in Jordan by Edraak online education platform, NRC and JRS.

The course was delivered to Syrian refugees only, in Za’atari and in Amman. It received significant interest, particularly in Za’atari. This led to a lower acceptance rate in Za’atari and a higher acceptance rate in Amman. Dropout rates ranged from 41% in Amman to over 50% in Za’atari and Amman (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participation data

	Completed applications	Accepted	Males	Females	Dropout**	Acceptance rate	Dropout rate**
Za'atari (NRC)	84	19*	90%	10%	10	23%	53%
Amman (JRS)	19	17	5	12	7	89%	41%

* Including those who abandoned from the very start

** Drop-outs are considered here all those students who did not end with a successful final exam. One student (in Za'atari) completed the course but will re-take the final exam. At the time of submitting this report, this student is included in the dropout count

2.2 The meaning of relevance in higher education

The course has been evaluated on its relevance and its impact on the beneficiaries. Relevance in higher education is an increasingly important topic of policy and academic research. Generally, the literature defines 'relevance of higher education' as personal development, sustainable employment, and active citizenship. A map of possible indicators of 'relevance' is provided in Appendix E¹.

Personal development implies an individual transformational process at a psychological, social, cognitive and moral level. From this perspective higher education contributes to better and realistic reflections of self, personality/character improvements, maturation and self-confidence etc. Even in non-emergency contexts, students consider personal development as increasingly important. According to Allen *et al.* (2011) 65% of European students indicate that higher education contributes to their personal development. In the context of this review – which evaluates a higher education course for Syrian refugees –, personal development is particularly poignant. One can argue that for refugees it involves providing young men and women with a renewed sense of self-worth and a perspective for their future. For this reason, it is unsurprising that in this review personal development emerged as the most appreciated contribution of the course.

A second aspect of higher education relevance is its contribution to employability and life-long learning (LLL). LLL implies the ability to anticipate the changing skill demands of domestic and international labour markets. It is a key priority for policymakers globally. Clearly, this element is important also for the course on Applied IT for refugees. However, employability in an emergency situation means something quite different because the labour market opportunities are limited (e.g. because of regulatory limitations). Hence, the findings and recommendations listed in this document should be interpreted accordingly.

¹ *Note:* the tables are from a draft non-public report produced as part of an ongoing EU-funded project on relevance in higher education. The information in the Tables is openly available and thus is provided for convenience in Appendix E. However, no reference is made to the report and its authors.

Finally, relevance is also ‘active citizenship’, which includes elements such as cultural literacy, tolerance, political literacy, socio-political participation, etc. It is generally hard to assess to what extent higher education contributes to this aspect. It is even harder if one tries to apply this element to an individual (applied) short course. Therefore, this review looked at this dimension of relevance from the perspective of ‘social aggregation’. The question is to what extent participating (again) in a higher education community increased (or had the potential to increase) learners’ social capital and, thence, their capacity to be truly active citizens.

3 Outcome of the Evaluation

With respect to the course’s *relevance and impact*, as shown in Section 2.2, ‘relevance in higher education’ is a multidimensional concept. Therefore, it is hard to say whether an individual short pilot course is ‘relevant’ in general. The findings indicate that overall the course was deemed highly relevant for participants particularly with regards to two aspects, namely (i) their personal development and (ii) the development of their skillset. While the description of the course focused on the concrete learning outcomes (i.e. skills and competencies directly associated with applied IT), the psychosocial element inherent in the personal development aspect of relevance was the most appreciated. The psychosocial elements emerged from talking with the students during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Students reported (a) a stronger sense of self and self-worth (thanks to the awareness of feeling again as part of a community of students on par with non-refugee students); (b) greater motivation to develop further (related to the fact that this was a ‘real’ university course with associated credits); (c) a more optimistic view of the future (again, associated with being somewhat ‘back to normal’, with possible prospects for transition and progression); and (d) a capacity to cope with new problems and ideas (emphasized especially by those students who participated in what was for them a very challenging but value-added course).

It must be noted here that, although the discussions were a free brainstorming of ideas, the underlying research approach (and thus the ‘steering design’ of the FGDs on this element) was based on three classic clusters of psychosocial growth elements emerging from the higher education literature, including (see e.g. See: Kuh, 1995; Kuh, et al., 1997; Kuh, 1988; Bar-On, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007):

- (a) better self-understanding, self-actualization, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, a sense of identity, self-respect, self-worth;
- (b) better and stronger motivation, interests, aspirations, sense of purpose etc.
- (c) more confidence, assertiveness, better interpersonal relationships, capacity to cope with problems, openness to new ideas, life satisfaction and happiness.

At the same time, students indicated very clearly that the IT field bears a strong attraction because of its potential for employability (*inter alia*, in the informal economy). From this perspective, the course did have a strong impact, and provided students with new life perspectives.

The aspect of *effectiveness* relates primarily to whether the design of this course is fit to achieve its objectives and address the problems it intends to address. The general finding is that all elements are all there but had to be adapted and changed to adjust to the circumstance on the ground. This is partly natural for a pilot experiment, and was also due to the fact that it was based on adapting an existing course to a blended learning setting. This yields useful lessons for a future adaptation of the model. Key areas relate to:

- a) the balance between the online and f2f elements: the online element was less appreciated not least because of a reported ‘cultural distrust’ for online learning. Yet, the primary issue appeared to be the pace of the online lectures and the difficulty to effectively communicate on distance. The presence of on-the-ground tutors was, thus, pivotal and ought to be maintained and strengthened e.g. with further training for the tutors;
- b) in principle, the course had all the facilities and the technology was effective. However, (especially in Za’atari) accessibility to the facilities faced significant time constraints (the facility closes at 3:30pm). This was deemed unfortunate because it hampered the flexibility that a blended learning design should afford. There is a clear trade-off between flexibility and economic viability (efficiency). As mentioned in one of the recommendations below, it is necessary that future courses of this kind ensure a critical mass of demand to justify more flexibility in service provision.

With regards to *sustainability*, the documentary analysis demonstrates a significant effort to make this pilot the basis for a sustainable supply of higher education to Syrian refugees. However, a sustainable programme must be financially feasible. The limited input (students) means that if facilities ran at full capacity they would face financial loss (compounded by administrative and regulatory requirement). Moreover, achieving accreditation is recommended to ensure the programme remains attractive to learners. Finally, the quality (in addition to the quantity) of the input needs to be carefully vetted. A dropout rate of over 40% (over a pool of students of 15-20) represents a significant wastage. It is questionable whether future courses can develop on this basis. Naturally, the emergency situation explains much of this – reasons may relate to the conditions (e.g. lack of transportation to go to the centre; finding a better offer at a university, etc.) or the applicants’ unpreparedness (which could be compensated with bridge courses or more a flexible offer).

4 The Evaluation

The evaluator’s remit included:

- to assess the relevance and impact of the module for the intended beneficiaries;
- to assess whether the blended learning mode of delivery proved efficient and efficacious for the intended beneficiaries;
- to provide options for future adaptations of the model based on the stakeholders’ feedback. Stakeholders consulted in the process included the course deliverers

(academics and local tutors), enabling organisations (NRC and JRS), and the learners.

The evaluator points out that he cannot provide findings regarding:

- the financial viability of the proposed options to adapt the module's design in the future;
- the regulatory compliance of proposed options to adapt the module's design in the future (e.g. with respect to national and international labour and regulations)

4.1 Evaluation Methods

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the Jamiya's Terms of Reference (ToR, Appendix A), and the subsequent agreements set out in the approved Inception Report (31 January 2017, Appendix B). The process consisted of the following five phases, with this Evaluation Report coming at the end of Phase 3:

- 1) Jamiya set the Terms of Reference following consultation with the funders;
- 2) Consultant's preliminary analysis of documentation supplied by Jamiya ('background');
- 3) Visit of the Consultant appointed by Jamiya to the locations where the course was delivered (Za'atari and Amman), followed by this written Evaluation Report;
- 4) Jamiya's response to the Consultant's report;
- 5) Publication of the approved report on www.jamiya.org website, following a dissemination meeting with the donors on 6 March 2017.

The objectives of the evaluation were set by Jamiya in agreement with the consultant as described above. Jamiya appointed an individual expert to carry out the course evaluation on its behalf. The consultant reflected a range of expertise and experience in higher education and programme evaluation, in accordance with the ToR for this review. The ToR and the Inception Report were discussed at a meeting between Jamiya and the Consultant on 24 January 2017 at the Jamiya premises located at LaVallée Coworking Space, Rue Adolphe Lavallée 39, 1080 Brussels, Belgium.

In advance of the site visit the Consultant conducted a desk-based review of the documentation provided by Jamiya to gain insights in the purpose and design of the course. The documentation provided a wealth of interesting information, including expected learning outcomes, an evaluation from the on-site tutors, eligibility criteria, a risk analysis, and financial scenarios. The site visit took place on February 6th, 7th (Za'atari Refugee Camp, NRC), 8th and 9th (JRS centre, Amman). On site, the consultant conducted FGDs with students, interviews with students who abandoned, as well as with the academic officers, contact points and tutors from NRC and JRS. Interviews were also conducted remotely (via Skype and by telephone) with the academics involved in the course. The agenda, including the list of persons with whom the consultant interacted is provided in Appendix C.

The Consultant acknowledges the impressive volume of documentation submitted. However, the approach resulted in a project document providing an overall summary of course design with other, separate, documents providing more detail. It might perhaps have been more helpful to include all this information into one more integrated document.

The division of tasks between the different parties was clearly articulated. However, much of the information seemed an adaptation of an existing model and an *ad hoc* attempt to produce a course without always a sufficient awareness of the beneficiaries' demands, expectations, and levels of prior knowledge. The latter point also emerged during the visit and the interviews, with learners reporting unanimously that too little information was provided on essential aspects of the course such as assessment criteria and methods, the meaning and value of the ECs, etc. Moreover, the interviewees indicated that better selection at entry is necessary in the future.

5 Findings in relation to the objectives of the course review

5.1 Findings with respect to the background of the module (Phase I)

An analysis of the documents shows that considerable work has been done by Jamiya in defining the learning outcomes, the access requirements, the learners' expected effort (consistent with a 7.5 EC EQF L6 module), and in designing the delivery schedule and clearly identifying the roles of all the parties involved (Jamiya team, Gothenburg university, local tutors and local facilitators – NRC and JRS).

The documentation indicates that *formally* all of the following aspects of the course are consistent with the module's purported aims and the level set:

- entry requirements and the required documentation: a secondary level certificate, an 'International Computer Driving Licence' (ICDL), and access to the internet for the online component;
- intended learning outcomes: are consistent with a EQF L6 qualification;
- expected learner effort: 12 weeks including 15 hours of individual work in addition to the online and f2f classes is compatible with a 7.5 EC course (one EC corresponds approximately to a total 28 hours of student work);
- the designed assessment policy;
- the role and induction of tutors: the amount and quality of training the tutors received, their selection, and the requirements for weekly reports is commendable.

Moreover, a strategic planning on the financial viability of a 1-year version of the course (including costs, necessary enrolments and different scenarios) was developed. The pilot was meant to support a long-term strategic development of different programmes and possible scaling up. In fact, the early dropouts and problems of student attainment (and prior

preparation) made it clear that scaling up with this model would not be appropriate given the early dropouts and findings of student attainment.

A number of areas in the design which warrant further attention. These areas emerge from the documents and were reiterated during the interviews and the FGDs with students:

- The learning outcomes are consistent with EQF L6. However, the course description does not mention concrete access, transfer and progression options;
- There were no full alternatives for admission requirements although the project showed a remarkable degree of flexibility (e.g. accepting copies of certificates to circumvent the difficulty Syrian refugees have in obtaining original documentation). The reviewer is aware that these risks have adequately and seriously been considered in designing the course but puts forth for consideration that future adaptations of this model might endeavour to take an (even) deeper and personalized look into the complexity of the applicants' situation;
- The pilot nature of this exercise might have been clearer to its designers than its participants. Because of the pilot nature of the course there is no mention of concrete (strategic) action plans to ensure the module would be part of a fully accredited programme in the future. A pilot implies that the development and design of future courses and full programmes would be based on lessons learned in this experience;
- With regards to ECs and accreditation options, the documentation reviewed for this evaluation mentions that 'there is the possibility that it will be fully accredited, but Jamiya Project is awaiting final confirmation from the University that this will be the case'. The reviewer is fully aware that it is not possible to provide assurances with respect to accreditation statuses and that this was the communication line jointly agreed between the parties to make clear that no agreement on this issue was yet in place. It is also acknowledged that this standpoint was reiterated to students verbally (this was confirmed in conversations with students). However, it is recommended that in future adaptations of the module, Jamiya and partners provide more concrete evidence of steps being taken to reach accreditation (in the interest and for the protection of learners), and – possibly – a very clear explanation (perhaps in appendices which students might opt to access) to fully clarify of the difference between granting ECs and providing a course 'worth' or 'equivalent to' a number of ECs (granted, this is no guarantee that students will understanding this).
- The balance between f2f and online shifted throughout the course. There appeared to be a misalignment between the initial plan (i.e. a balance where the f2f element would *support* the online element) and its eventual implementation, where students relied far more dependent on the f2f element (because of the difficulty of the video material).

5.2 Findings with respect to in-depth interviews and FGDs (Phase II)

The FGDs with students represented the core of the evaluation's on-site phase. In Za'atari five students participated (all male). In Amman, at the JRS premises, five students participated (four

females and one male). Furthermore interviews were conducted with the tutors and the local contact points (see agenda in Appendix C).

The FGDs were of approximately three hours in length. To systematise the discussion and gauge the relevance and impact of the course on students, the sessions included a number of steps (see also presentation in Appendix D). Steps 1-6 were conducted during the FGD's first half. During step 7 we brainstormed on the alignment between the contextual uncertainties and the course's contribution in tackling them.

The steps included:

- 1) exploring the context (uncertainties);
- 2) clustering the uncertainties;
- 3) rating the uncertainties (0= certain; 10 very uncertain);
- 4) exploring the course;
- 5) clustering the key aspects of the course;
- 6) rating the aspects of the course (0= unimportant; 10= very important);
- 7) brainstorming about the alignment between the contextual uncertainties and the contribution of the course in question.

The Charts below present the outcomes of stages 1-6 and were the basis for discussing the relevance and impact of the course.

The following cautionary notes must be kept in mind:

- The exercise does not have the pretence of statistical significance. The goal was to trigger a discussion about the extent to which the course was fit to address the learners' challenges;
- Although in general similar themes emerged, the two groups differed in some of the areas, as shown in the charts and briefly discussed below.

Chart 1. Major uncertainties of learners—Za’atari

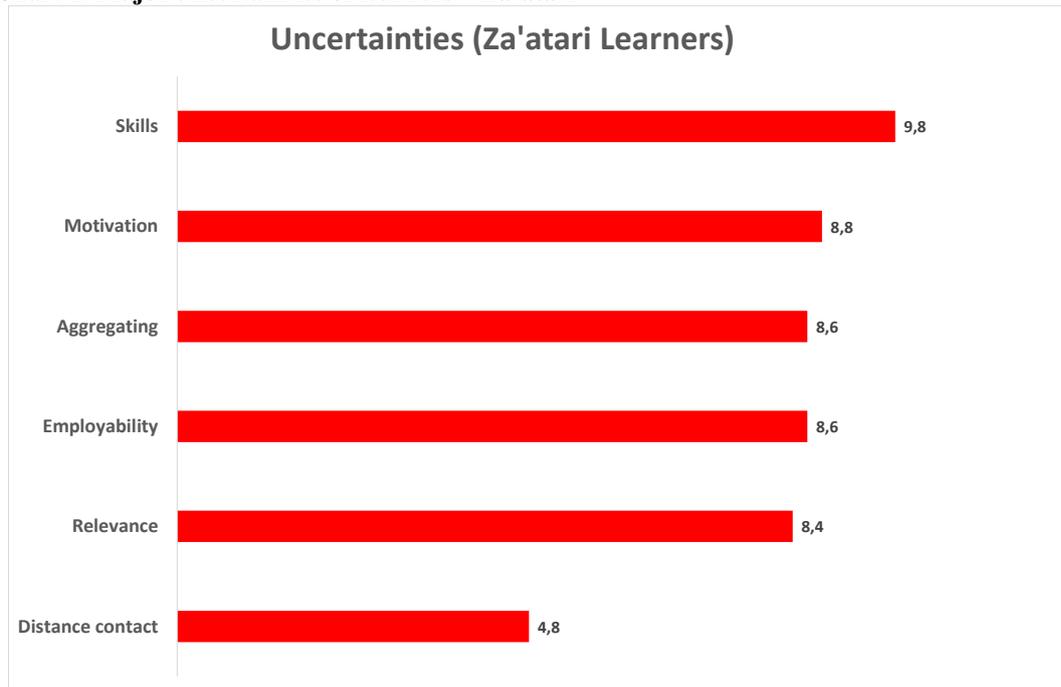


Chart 2. Important aspects of the course—Za’atari

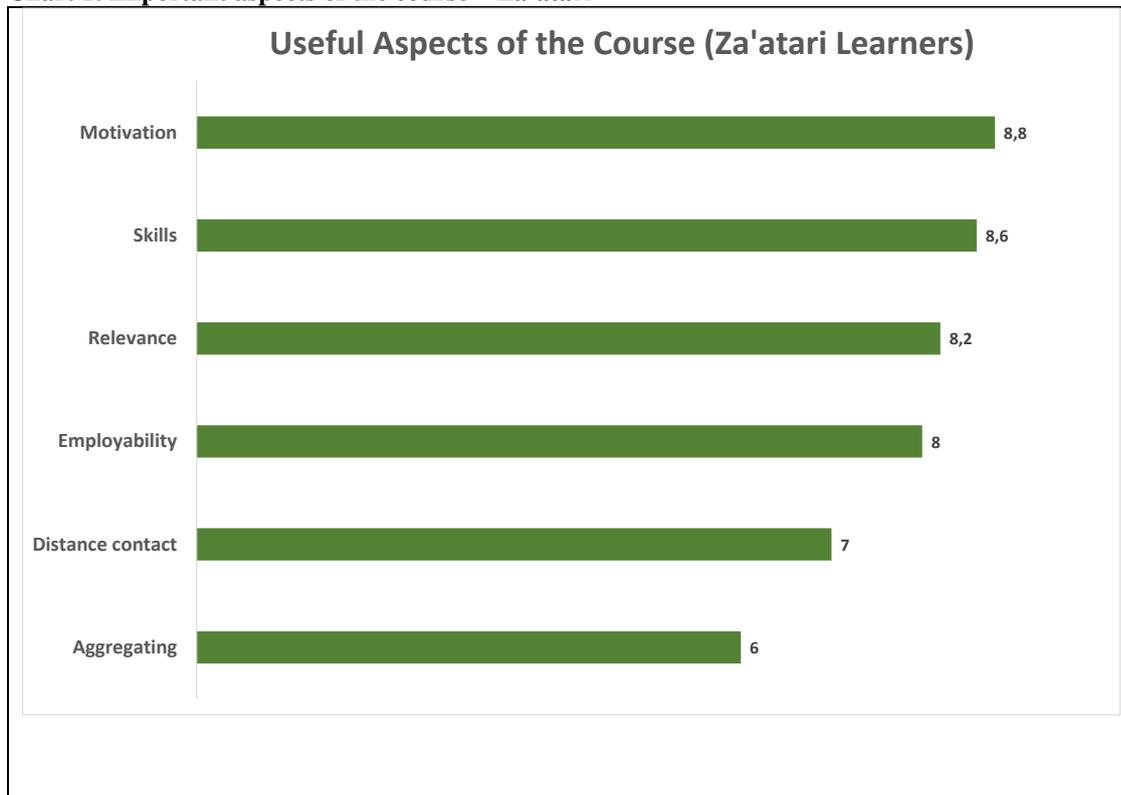


Chart 3. Major uncertainties of learners—Amman

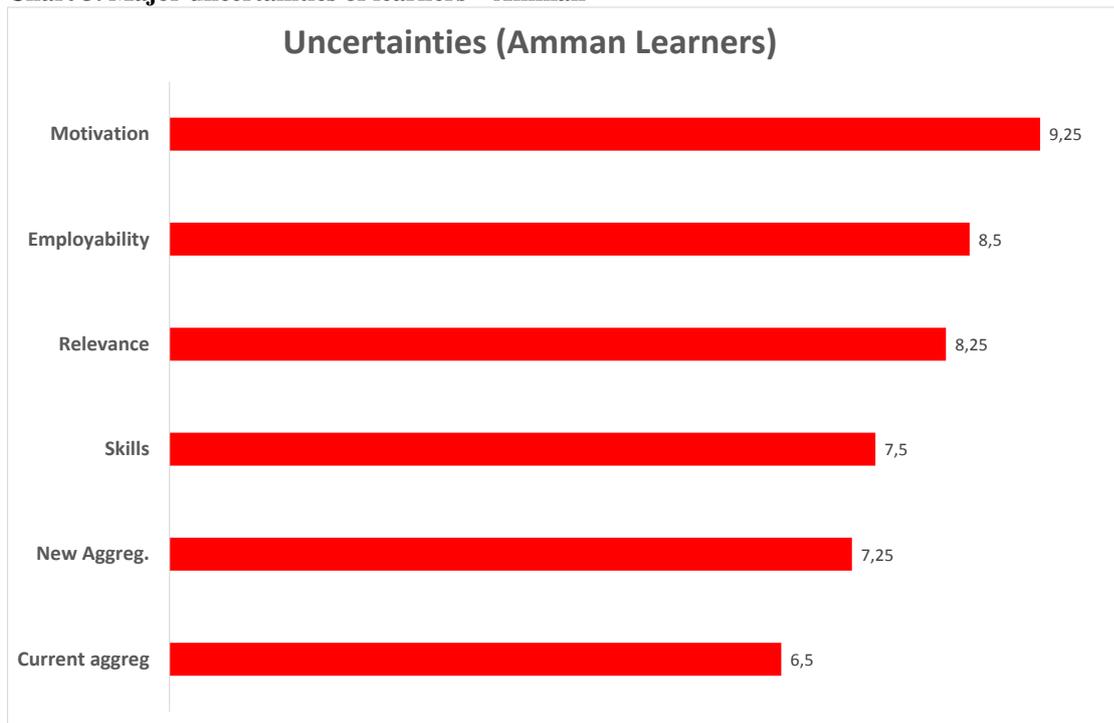


Chart 4. Important aspects of the course— Amman

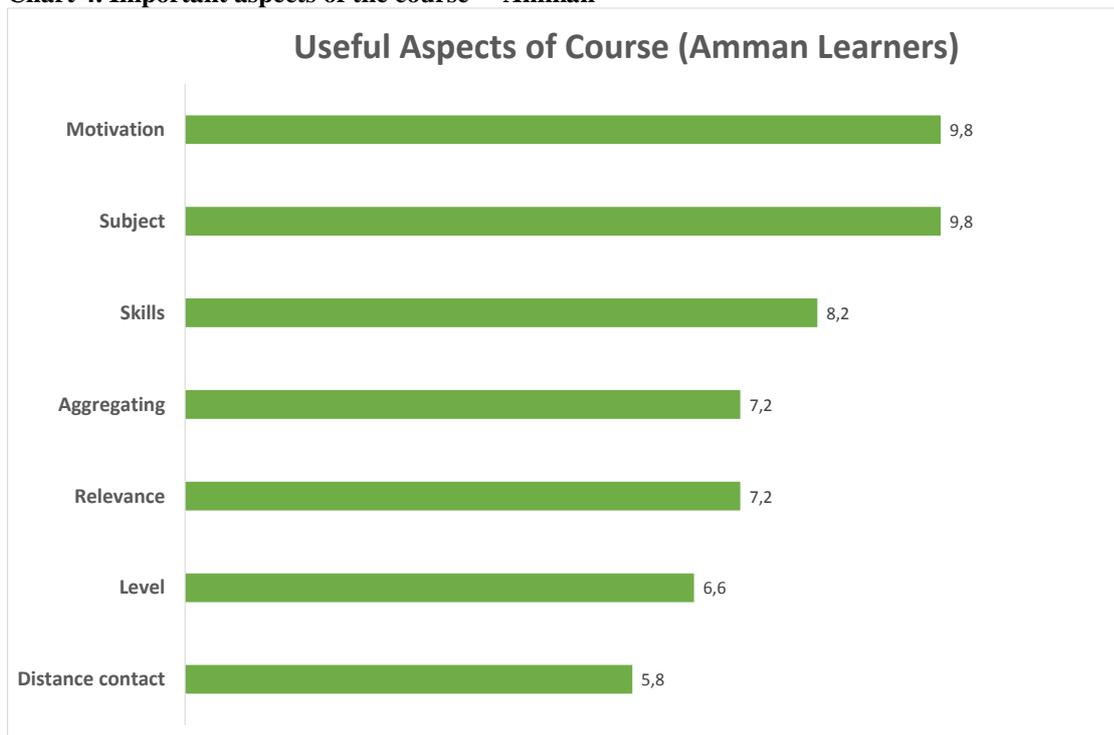


Chart 5. Alignment elements of the course – learners’ challenges—Za’atari

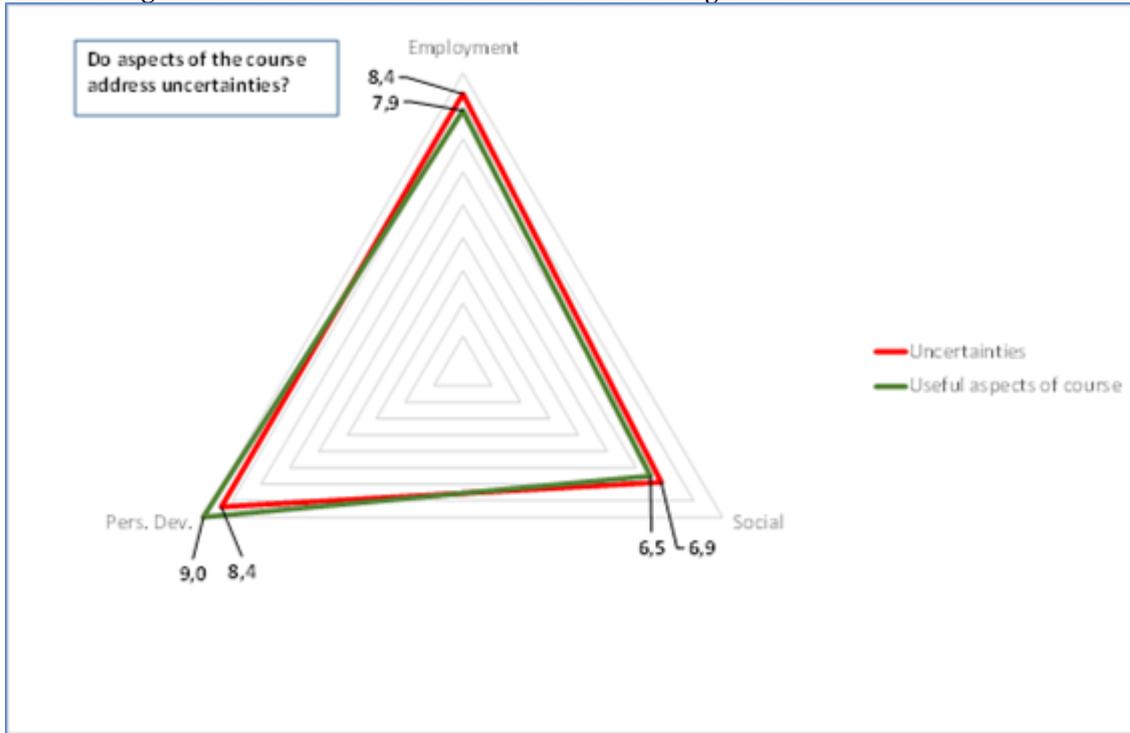
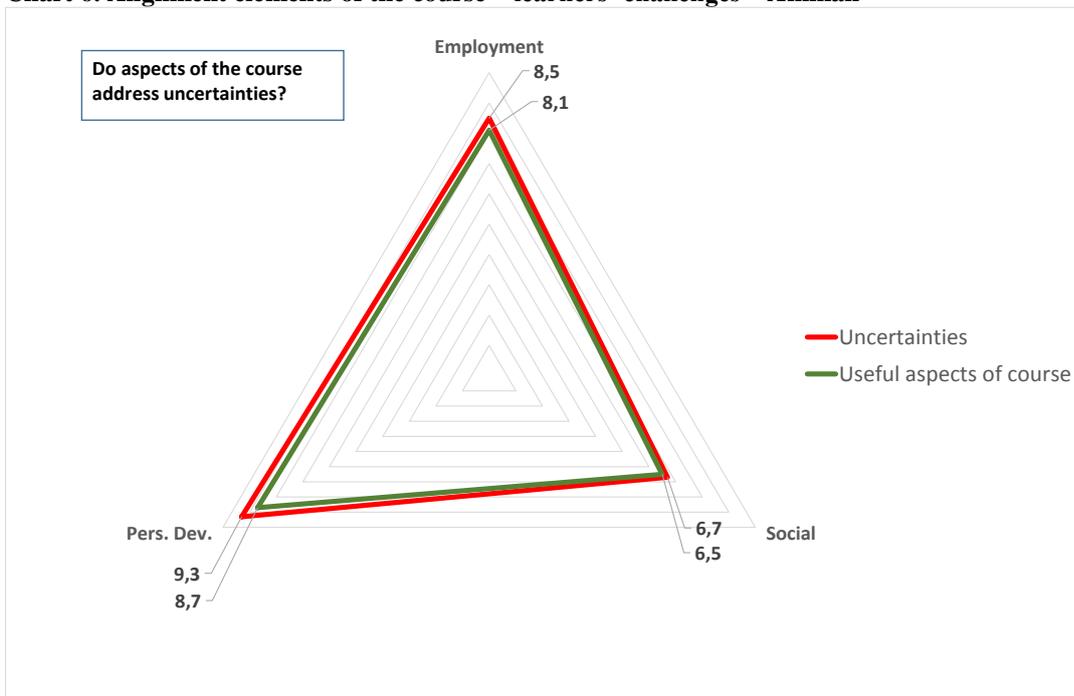


Chart 6. Alignment elements of the course – learners’ challenges—Amman



Charts 1-4 show that both in Za’atari and in Amman learners faced similar challenges. Two uncertainties emerged as particularly prominent:

- a) The prospect to be meaningfully employed in the future and to develop the necessary skillset;
- b) The ability to maintain and build social capital.

The former challenge was significant for both groups. However, the Amman learners pointed out that maintaining motivation was hardest whilst in Za’atari learners were more concerned with acquiring skills. Although it would be moot to draw firm conclusions from such a limited sample, it is apparent that the context of Amman offers refugees more opportunities to better themselves than Za’atari. Therefore, participants in Amman were more uncertain about preserving their motivation to, *inter alia*, partake in education and trainings for relevant employment than about finding alternative opportunities.

Second, learners in Za’atari emphasised a disconnect between ‘physical’ and ‘virtual’ aggregation (via social media, Skype, WhatsApp, etc.). Instead, in Amman participants did not discuss ‘virtual’ aggregation but emphasised that their current situation can thwart building new contacts (i.e. acquiring more social capital). In other words, in Za’atari the main discussion on ‘aggregation’ and ‘social contact’ focused on the *means* to maintain and build social contacts. Za’atari students saw online/distance contact as less uncertain in their future as opposed to social aggregation – see Chart 1). In Amman, students were focused on the problem of new contacts vs. existing contacts (the issue of virtual contact did not emerge as an uncertainty). Amman-based students found that their problem in the future was more likely creating new contacts than maintaining their old or existing contacts (by any means – physical or virtual). One might interpret this as an issue related (also) to integration in a new society. There may be different explanations for this – for example Amman students have already better internet connections and face more the problem of integrating within the Jordan society itself.

Charts 5 and 6 compare to what extent participants felt that the course of Applied IT addressed their uncertainties. With the same cautionary notes mentioned heretofore, the results are promising in that they do indicate that learners, both in Za’atari and in Amman, felt the course did take seriously their concerns for the future. Again, one cannot draw definite conclusions from these charts. However, the subsequent discussions indicated that in Amman, the course was generally seen as slightly less aligned with the learners’ uncertainties.

But, perhaps more importantly, all participants suggested that personal development was the most tangible aspect of the course. This was most clear in Za’atari, where the discussion strongly indicated that being a student in this course gave them a stronger sense of self-worth and of developing personally besides ‘learning a trade’. Indeed, during the discussion in Za’atari it became clear that this was somewhat unexpected – their primary motivation was to acquire skills for employment but their ultimate assessment was that personal development was stronger than what they expected. Chart 5 shows that the ‘uncertainty personal development’ was rated 8.4 on average among the five participants, but the course’s contribution was actually 9 on average. This differs in Amman, where the uncertainty about personal development was seen as the most important, but the course’s contribution to personal development was lower –

albeit still considered the most important aspect. Another aspect that emerged in both groups is that both the uncertainties and the course's contribution to individuals' social development were deemed weaker than the other dimensions (personal development and employment).

However, as the charts show – and the discussions confirmed – students felt that the course generally met their expectations despite minor discrepancies between needs and responses to those needs.

6 Commendations and recommendations

As a result of this review the consultant wishes to propose seven commendations and 15 recommendations. The commendations and recommendations are meant to support the Jamiya team in designing future courses (in a blended learning mode) to promote higher education participation for refugees and other vulnerable groups. A note of caution: recommendations are not *ipso facto* directly implementable. They might, and indeed will likely, need adaptation and be dependent on contextual elements (described also above). As an example, improving synchronous communication depends (*inter alia*) on good internet connectivity. Nevertheless, these recommendations should provide some guidance as to the desirable and food for thought on what underlying issues should also be kept into consideration.

6.1 Commendations

- 1) The blended learning design (a mix of online and f2f interaction with tutors) must be commended as it provided learners with high-level professional content complemented by necessary support to progress;
- 2) The course must be commended for including in its design an active role for local tutors. Tutors on the ground provided assurance to learners that they 'were taken seriously'. Moreover, the availability of tutors compensated for the difficulties inherent in the online delivery and provided much needed flexibility in delivery;
- 3) The certificate issued by an established university merits commendation: it made the course attractive to prospective learners and contributed significantly to their psychosocial development (the sense of 'being a student again' provides learners a new sense of perspective for the future);
- 4) The facilities made available to students at both centres were functional, adequately equipped and with good internet connectivity (although there are issues related to flexi-timing – see recommendations);
- 5) The opportunities offered to broaden social and professional contacts for learners merits commendation;
- 6) The psychosocial effects of this module merits commendation: reportedly, it improved not only the learners' self-esteem and individual perspectives for the future, but also the perspectives of their families and their broader surrounding community;
- 7) The language of delivery (Arabic) made a significant difference in (a) attracting students and (b) making the module accessible and understandable.

6.2 Recommendations

- 1) The design of similar courses needs to keep into account the different contexts where such courses will be delivered. The current pilot was designed for refugees both in Za’atari and in Amman. This showed that these very different contexts have varying levels of effectiveness, interest and motivation from students;
- 2) Future modules should consider including compulsory propaedeutic courses to prepare learners on the subject basics and language requirements. Learners were often unprepared and had to do significant ‘catching up’ throughout the module (both in IT content and specifically in understanding English that might be necessary for the course);
- 3) The online element of the module should strengthen the two-way interaction element. Both synchronous and asynchronous communication options should be assured. However, learners specifically indicated that they felt synchronous communication (directly with the lecturer online in real time) was a problem. They felt often the lecturer ‘went to fast’ and they ‘didn’t have the chance to directly pose questions’. Thus, they often resorted to ask tutors to fill gaps student had not understood;
- 4) Future modules should develop and implement better expectation management. All modules should provide clear information about progression opportunities, including the added value of providing ECs. This information should be (even more) clearly communicated in all promotional materials for learners;
- 5) Courses should consider providing (free or subsidised) shuttle services to enable learners to access the study centres (this recommendation applies for learners in Za’atari, where public transport is non-existent and mobility is also harder for women than for man – who often cycle² –);
- 6) Since home Internet access is severely limited for most learners (especially in Za’atari), learning centres should have longer and more flexible opening times;
- 7) To be sustainable, future modules must be able to attract a critical mass of applicants to make it financially viable for learning centres to provide long and flexible opening times. This requires staffing, permits, security etc., all of which involve significant costs. Jamiya and partners might consider a number of options, e.g. offering similar courses at lower EQF levels (particularly EQF L5, which maintains the post-secondary nature without being at bachelor-level) and thus attracting a larger pool of successful applicants; broadening Jamiya’s mission, which is to provide ‘[...] relevant and accessible higher education for Syrian refugees [...]’, to include other nationalities facing similar challenges;
- 8) Local tutors should be offered a short introductory training prior to the commencement of the course to ensure full complementarity between the online and the f2f components. This induction should make sure the needs of the tutors are

² Note that there is currently an ongoing (NRC) project in Za’atari to address this and give better transportation for women too

made clear from the start, discussing with the tutors themselves. The current format did include an induction, however, tutors often received materials quite late and had themselves limited time to prepare. This is also because the materials themselves were being produced as the course developed. In turn, this was due to practical reasons such as budgetary or time constraints. However, the experience shows that it might be worthwhile to keep these constraints very clearly in mind in designing future courses. Secondly, learners often saw the tutors as the ‘real’ teachers³;

- 9) The assessment criteria must be clearly explained to students in advance already in the promotional brochures. While the initial materials did include them, it is important that learners know on what learning outcomes they will be evaluated and Jamiya might consider taking on more responsibility in ensuring that the proper materials are distributed effectively and repeated throughout the course;
- 10) Future modules of this kind should continue to be subsidised / free; if possible, including a (free) internship period. At Za’atari this might be done with one of the NGOs present on site; future models might consider being developed in agreement with local organization so as to be (even) more relevant;
- 11) Jamiya, NRC, and JRS should explore the possibility of signing MoUs with organisations for the future employment of graduates of their courses; these courses and their value should, thus, be more widely disseminated beyond the pool of potential learners;
- 12) Future experiences of this type should actively promote (e.g. through continued outreach) the establishment of an ‘alumni’ group which could support new learners and look for further opportunities (e.g. in internships or identifying needs for future courses, opportunities for employing the graduate, etc.). Graduates could cooperate with Jamiya, e.g. by developing applications for them to bring the course forward and make new ones;
- 13) Students were given the opportunity to print materials at the centres but, apparently they did not avail themselves of this option fully (also because of technical and time constraints). If feasible and cost efficient, all reference materials should be made available to all learners, in hard and softcopy, including print-outs of the materials in advance (depending on the professor’s teaching and learning methods);
- 14) The use of social media (e.g. Facebook) between the learners, the tutors and the teachers should be explored to improve communication between the different groups; Students appreciated the use of WhatsApp, but indicated explicitly the possibility to create social site groups (e.g. Facebook) which are more sustainable in the long run and help build longer-term communities of learners. This could also allow the connection with other similar groups and knowledge exchange.
- 15) During the review it became apparent that the pool of applicants, and the learners who enrolled, had vastly different levels of knowledge and experience. This led to a sub-optimal learning environment and also reduced the effectiveness of the tutoring. This review recommends to include an entry test (even if original prior certificates will remain necessary) in order to ensure a more homogenous group of

³ This might be related to cultural differences between the Swedish and the Syrian models of, and relations in, T&L. Apparently, in Syrian academia it is more common for professors to rely on their assistant professors for significant elements of the teaching.

learners. More generally, it is recommended that Jamiya and partners find ways to ensure flexible entry options, alternatives to providing (original) documentation. In addition to entry tests, the recognition of prior experiential learning (leading to an experiential portfolio) might be an option to consider

7 Overall conclusion

Given the findings listed above, this review supports an expansion and adaptation of the blended mode of delivery to other (similar) contexts and fields of study, subject to considering a number of possible options. However, the recommendations listed above do not take into account possible regulatory or practical limitations. Future modules and/or programmes will have to fit these recommendations as best possible in the existing regulatory framework.

Moreover, the review also showed that it is not enough to provide learners – even in a refugee situation, i.e. non-traditional learners – skills and competencies in one field alone. While the possibility to acquire or improve IT skills was highly valued by learners (and clearly helped tout the course), courses should include a thorough element of ‘transferable skills’ (e.g. communication skills, creativity, critical thinking). These skills enable both the flexibility and feeling of self-worth that can provide long-term benefits. They are key not only to future employability but also to individuals’ personal development, which – as emerged from discussions – is highly valued.

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9 Appendices

Appendices are added as separate files, in a .zip folder

- A) Terms of Reference
- B) Approved Inception report
- C) Interview and site visit agenda
- D) Introductory presentation to FGDs
- E) Map of indicators of 'relevance in higher education'

10 Further reading

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