QA Annual Report 1

"Developing Research and InnoVation CapacitiEs in Albania and Kosovo / DRIVE"

Project reference No.: 610307-EPP-1-2019-AL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

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prepared by

Universum College

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Introduction

IDEA is a project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme Key Action 2 – Cooperation for Innovation and exchange of good practices – Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education. The general objective of this project is to contribute in the development of the research and innovation capacities of HEIs in Albania and Kosovo by enhancing their institutional capabilities, staff skills and networking. In attaining the main objective of IDEA, consortium partners will dedicate their resources in attaining the following resources

1.   Enhance the teachers' capacities and their methodologies so that they effectively equip the students (graduate level and beyond) with the skills to conduct independent research.

2.   Enhance the mentors' capacities to effectively guide the students in their research activity.

3.   Enhance the research capacities of the academic and managerial staff through study visits and tailored training.

4.   Strengthen the managerial capacities for research activities and innovation in institutional level by setting or strengthening dedicated research and innovation support structures (RISS).

5.   Promote research excellence and innovation by developing a network that eases the interdisciplinary and cooperation among local and international actors.

This report is a part of the IDEA project Quality Plan and Monitoring Work Package 6. Respectively this report represents activity 6.3 Mid term report. As described in the QA Plan, the overall aim of Quality Assurance is to monitor and evaluate all project activities. To do this, a number of tools have been developed. This mid term report aims to provide a detailed overview of the progress and processes of each WP in the first half of the project (November 2019 – June 2021). It will further provide an overview of the impact of the activities implemented on the target groups, taking into account the key progress and performance indicators which were defined in the QA Plan.

In order to track the progress and achievements of all project activities, we have asked all of the consortium partners to share this questionnaire with the members of their institution who are actually engaged with the project activities, reports and dissemination. This is the first report dedicated for this activity meanwhile a separate report is dedicated only for the WP Leaders and steering committee members of the project partners. Below in the annex section of this report you can find attached the questionnaire used to collect information for monitoring and evaluation.

Chapter I
Overall Project Feedback Analysis

Universum College in coordination with all of the consortium partners has attended and received feedback from partners in each partner meeting including training, management and activity implementation. In general, QA team acquired a good overview of the activities carried out in the 9 different Work Packages. To get a deeper insight into the progress of all work packages and to identify possible strengths and weaknesses during implementation, we asked respondents to answer the questions sincerely, report any issues as well as provide honest feedback in order to address any given issue to the steering committee, partners and project coordinators.

Project Implementation of activities according to respondents from partner institutions

Universum College in coordination with all of the consortium partners has given effort to measure the implementation level of activities. Given the difficult times of operations of the institutions, it is important to highlight that many partners have face various governmental restrictions which hindered the implementation of many activities physically. While this does not apply per se' to project activities only, institutions in general were forced to come up with alternative way's of activity implementations in their institutions. In general, activities requiring physical presence were organized in blended and mostly virtual ways.

Activities organized in virtual ways are:

- Steering committee meetings

- Project collaboration meetings

- Dissemination activities

Activities organized in blended method (physical and virtual) include:

- Workshops

- Focus groups

- Data gathering

- Partner meetings

- Info Sessions with stakeholders

Project Management and Communication

Partners' feedback approve the management strategy as well as management activities conducted so far. Consortium expresses the satisfaction of project management, coordinator approach as well as coordinator's willingness to always provide information and support for project partner in different phases of project implementation.

Overall project management strategy and it's implementation receives "full grade" and positive feedback by consortium respondents. There are no reported issues regarding project coordination, management or steering committee by any of the contacted, respectively engaged respondents.

Project Outcomes

Regarding the achieved project results, partners express their satisfaction and highlight some of the drawbacks of the implementation. However, all of the outcomes achieved prove good cooperation and positive results. As highlighted some minor drawbacks such as delays in outcomes and lack of physical presences in promotion and disseminating outcomes are due to Covid -19 restrictions and impact.

In general there are no project outcomes that have not been attained as planned by project timeline for this period of the midterm reporting. Almost all partners respond that they have a clearer understanding of their research capacities and what they need to do in order to further strengthen and cooperation in the region and further develop their research capacities. This proves that by small steps the general project outcome and aim is also being accomplished.

Chapter II.

Respondent Feedback, graphs and statistics

Overall evaluation of project activities

The following replies have been provided in response to the second Evaluation Questionnaire, which aimed to gather feedback about general implementation of project activities at each HEI/organization, about Management and Communication and Outcomes achieved so far.

Implementation at your HEI/ organization

As can be seen in the detailed answers below, regarding implementation of the DRIVE project at their own Higher Education Institutions (HEI)/organization, partners are in the great majority highly satisfied; the proposed timeline of activities was both realistic and feasible for partner organizations and 69.2% are very or completely satisfied with the progress of activities in their institution. 92.3% of respondents declared that they didn't have any difficulties with the implementation of activities. 7.7% report difficulties/challenges with implementation, which are further explained in the replies to the following question. A number of these difficulties are related to Covid-19 and its effects on implementation/cooperation. Specifically some of the partners stated that they had problems as a result of Covid-19 was virtual meeting instead of real meeting brings challenges in interaction. In general pandemic related difficulties   No major difficulty is reported The awareness level of the project is described by the majority of partners as "excellent" 53.8%; "good" 34.6% and 11.5% describe it as "fair".

The description of activities implemented so far that partners have provided shows that all partners have been actively involved in diverse project activities. Mainly activities that were held by the partners are as follows: kick off the meeting, workshops and trainings, established the project management structures, development of new mentoring and teaching methodologies that enhance students research scales, training workshop on teaching methodologies, training workshop on mentoring research students, working on guidelines for research mentoring

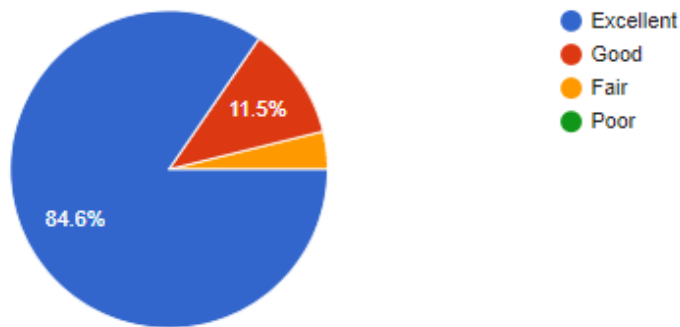*Fig. 2: How do you rate the work carried out by the project team at your own HEI/organisation?*

Fig 3: Was the proposed timeline of activities realistic and feasible for Your HEI/organisation?
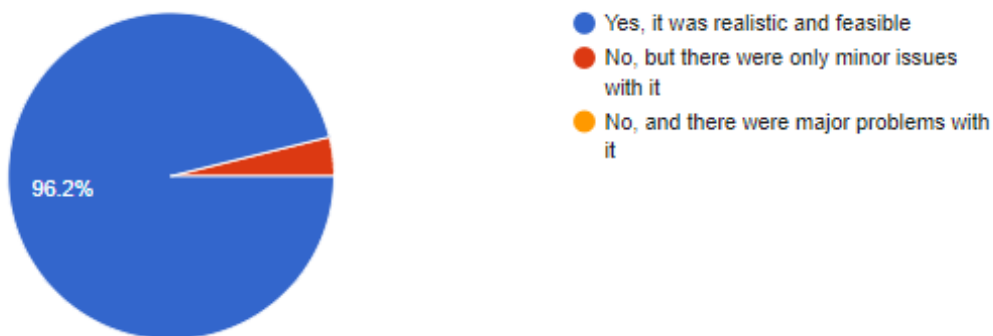

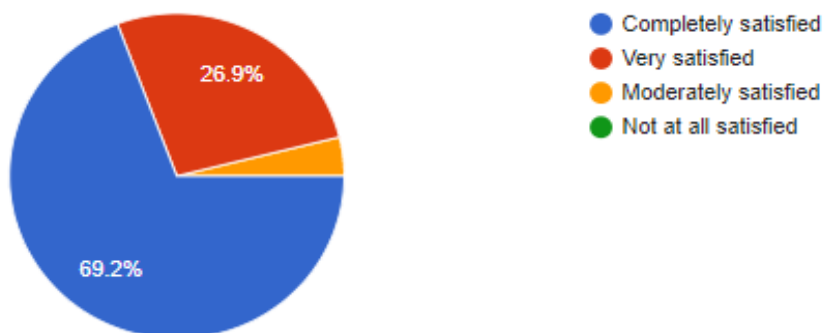*Fig. 4: How satisfied are you with the progress of activities in your institution?*

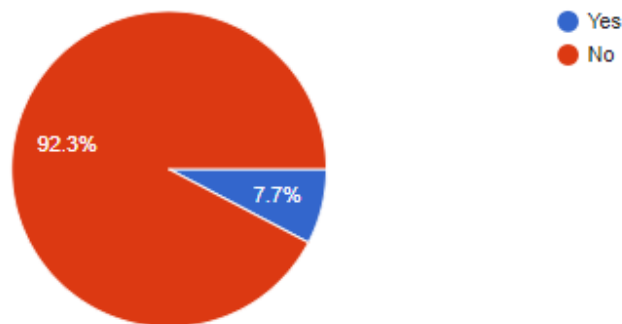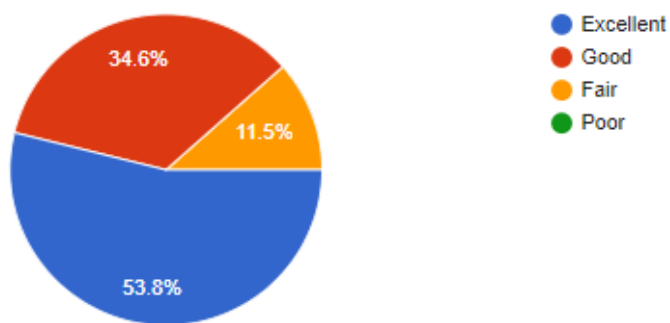*Fig. 5: Did you have any difficulties/challenges in the implementation of the activities?*

Fig. 6: What is the awareness level about the project in your institution
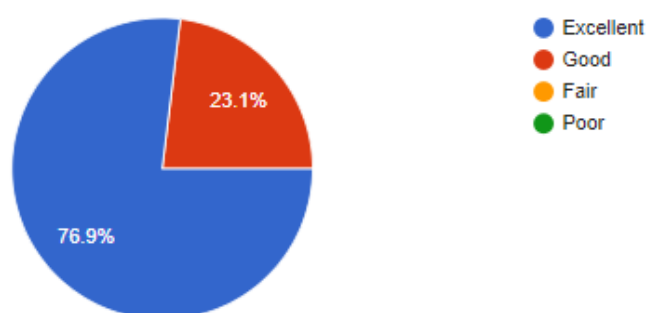
Management and Communication

The feedback on Overall Management and Communication of the DRIVE project is positive. As can be seen in the detailed answers below, the evaluation for overall project management and coordination is 76.9% "excellent" and 23.1% "good", while financial management is rated by 61.5% of partners between "excellent" and by 38.5% as "good". Overall time management has a slightly lower evaluation: 73.1% responded that it was "excellent", 23.1% "good" and 3.8 % "fair". Communication between partners is evaluated by 80.8 % of partners as "excellent" and by 11.5% as "good", and 7.7% as "fair". Overall visibility and communication activities have an outstanding evaluation of 69.2% as "excellent", 23.1% as "good" and 7.7% "fair".

From the further recommendations on Management/Communication provided, one can extract the following advice for future implementation:

1) Web page to be updated on time.

2) If possible try to organize the planned study visits physically and not substitute them with online training.

3) Using the dedicated website for info broadcasting and exchange for everyone to access.

Fig. 7: How do you rate the overall project management and coordination of the project?

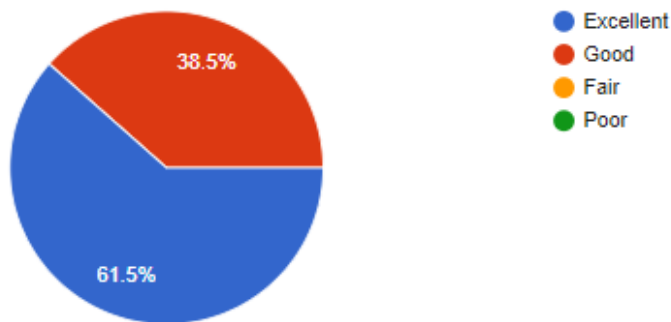*Fig. 8: How do you rate overall financial management of the project?*

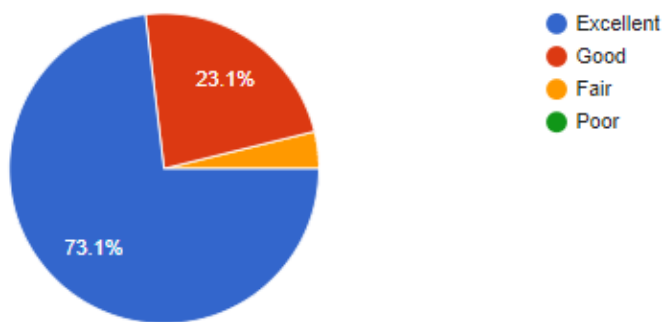*Fig. 9: How do you rate overall time management and respect of agreed deadlines in the project?*

Fig. 10: How do you rate the quality of communication among partners and project management team?
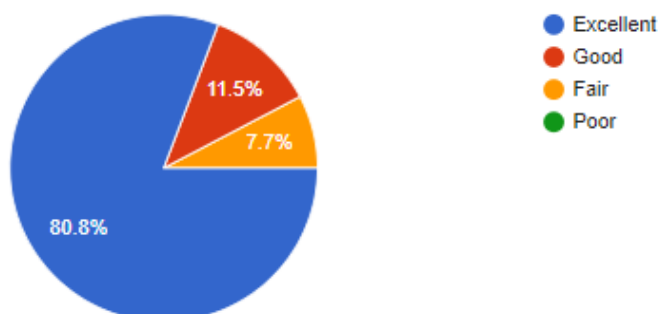
Fig. 11: How do you rate the efficiency of visibility and communication means at project level?
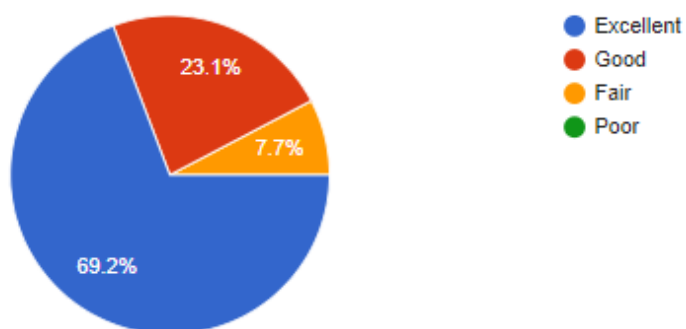
Visibility/ communication activities undertaken

It is a positive thing that 69.2% of partners report having undertaken visibility/communication activities and the other part that decelerate that they didn't undertake any visibility/communication activities to promote DRIVE includes 30.8%. Below are specified the activities that are undertaken from partners to promote DRIVE:

1. Through own Institutional Web/ social media
2. Sharing info on the project objectives and results in department, faculty meetings; sharing the project website; various posts in the partners websites and social media on project activities, mail communications with the staff regarding equipment and the library access provided by the project, info on the project provided to the ministry and accreditation agency during accreditations.
3. Apart from communication emails and newsletters related to the DRIVE project, the institution has also developed individual and collective meetings, social media and website activities in order to inform, involve and engage further academic staff and students. Such a process was fundamental for the proper implementation of the activities in our courses.
4. Promotion of project activities at official university website and social media

5. Publication in the organization's newsletter
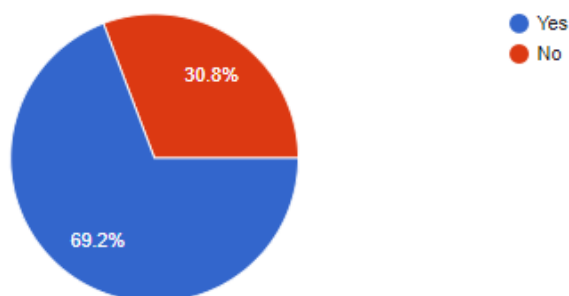
6.

Fig. 12: Did your institution undertake any visibility/communication activities to promote DRIVE?

Outcomes

According to partner responses, generally the project has achieved all of the foreseen outcomes based on the timeline. Respondents highlight that although updated teaching and research methodologies are still at the pilot phase, yet they have started to see the positive impact that those methodologies serve to the universities. The training and workshops held for staff members prove to be very effective and those trainings as outcomes are highly appreciated by project partners. Respondents, generally welcome workshops organized and methodologies developed after workshops. They highlight that plans and methodologies remain as the main outcomes developed so far. Training workshop on mentoring research students was very appropriate and helpful. Therefore, new methodologies developed, design thinking workshops and processes are believed to have helped all participants in reflecting the existing curricula and research practices. Outcomes produced and networking will help participants to come up with innovative and new ideas in the future. One of the respondents, however, anonymously has expressed his/her/they dissatisfaction regarding project results and outcomes.

Chapter III.
Final remark and conclusion

Lessons learnt

Partners respond that they personally have learnt a number of different things, among these:

- I learned personally that there is still gap in many aspects of research that has to be improved
- Yes. New teaching methodologies such as PBL and SBL
- Yes, I have learnt about new approaches in teaching.
- I have learned new methods to implement and also to adapt in current teaching / tutoring.
- I received information how the mentoring process of MsC and PhD should be improved research mentoring good examples
- Yes, personally learned much during this period thanks to this project?
- Yes, I have learned new teaching methodologies like PBL and also new mentoring practices.
- The exchange of mentoring and supervision experience during the workshops was enlightening
- Yes. New mentoring research students approaches
- Got information about resources needed to introduce new mentoring processes and how such practices and processes may be adapted to the existing structures of our University.
- I am more aware about methodologies that partner institutions from Europe develop and also the link between their works in relationship to the methodologies we develop at POLIS University.
- Yes. New mentoring techniques
- We could exchange a lot during the trainings.
- YES, new teaching methodology and is application.
- IT learning has limited capabilities in this educational program
- Yes, a number of best practices , but I have especially appreciated the training on research mentoring
- I learnt many things about the economy of Albania

Missing information or knowledge

There seem to be no major lack of information or knowledge. Some comments of partners, however, show that partner institutions need:

- There is still lack of active engagement of the staff during the project implementation activities

- Research methodologies

- Better cooperation with industry can help to implement better in some cases the project

- There are still some activities foreseen in order to have possibility to frame all information to be updated

- Collaboration with industry, training staff, soace for working in group

- Due to covid, the institution was not able to organize face to face meetings

- I think we need more cooperation with other institutions.

- Additional human resources would be helpful more trainings to strengthen the research capacity

- UET still lacks establishing linking shackles with the industry and labor market, in terms of offering applied research for the country's economy and industries. - Lack of practical skills and competences in Academia. - Weak network of Professorate with their PhDs students (rarely share their professional and academic network with them). - ICT basis & logistics needs to be more comprehensive, powerful, upgraded and widely used;

- I wouldn't consider any skills that are lacking but I think we must develop further mutual exchanges between academic staff and stronger link between the courses we develop in order to create a more complementary methodology within courses that also could give a more holistic approach to the student learning process.

- Establish the network of research

- The innovation management in university level, which as far as we have been informed will take place during the second year of the project new methodologies of teaching and research

- We are learning by doing. Visiting EU partner research institution and their centers probably will help. For example we did establish the office that should go through the senate, and there name was changed to "Scientific Research and Project management office" instead of initially proposed "Research and Innovation Support Structure"

Further recommendations and comments

Partners have provided a number of further recommendations and comments:

- More training opportunities that we cover all aspects of research and innovation

- Networking events for up and coming researchers

- Motivating a network for research work

- Inclusion in the activities of more academic staff from each Institution

- Working in groups, collaborations with industry and institutions

- There could be organized periodic meetings to discuss the implementation of the project.

- initiate and strengthen collaboration among HEIs of the region in the areas of research and innovation

- It would be great to have more physical activities and also include more students' opinions on the successful examples, critical stand points but also in general to include more their perspective.

- Project outputs and results to be transferred outside the partnership

- It would be beneficial to have more information exchange with other partners

- Implementation of the research and teaching methodologies guidelines

- How to assess the impact of what we are doing? How to do something more grounded on down-to-earth problems? This should be our main concern.

Evaluators Conclusions and Recommendations

This report is based on a survey and individual contact with partners and their engaged staff on project activities. Members of partnering institutions were asked for feedback on activities, cooperation with partners, overall management and communication as well as impact on target groups and partner institutions.

All partners contributed to the survey and have provided an overall positive assessment of the project activities and project progress.

In general, **implementation** has been somewhat hampered by the effects of the Covid-19 crisis. For instance, physical events were delayed or postponed to an unknown time. Some online activities and workshops did not produce the overall outcome as expected or there were delays and modifications to the activities in order to ensure everyone's' safety. However, all partners are confident that the delays can be made up in the next two years of the project and therefore do not pose a fundamental problem for implementation.

Another reason for a positive assessment and optimistic view on the further implementation of the project activities is the **management and communication**, which are described by all partners as "good" to "excellent".

The **dissemination activities** of the DRIVE project have been very well guided by the original dissemination plan and activities as described in the corresponding WP (can be found in project description) many dissemination activities have taken place and more is yet to come in the following year. All partners keep on utilizing social media channels and their communication methodologies in exploiting project results.. Nonetheless, it is very important that all partners intensify their dissemination activities over the next few months in order to make the project more visible among relevant actors and target groups, both inside and outside their institutions.

As far as the **results** of the project are concerned, the answers of the partners are divided: while some are satisfied with what has been achieved so far, others state that they had higher expectations. However, all those who are more critical of the results share the view that the main reason for the delays is to be found in the current health crisis.

Overall, the partnership shows quite a high level of satisfaction with implementation of project activities. The cooperation between partners seem to work well overall and overall management and coordination is rated as satisfying as well. We would like to highlight positively that all partners have submitted their feedback. We wish that the commitment of partners to provide feedback will remain as high in the next project years, as it is very important to get a comprehensive picture of the implementation progress and possible issues that require attention.

In what follows, we have put together a number of suggestions for the partnership:

Management and Coordination: Regularly organized meetings at shorter intervals (e.g. monthly) would support the overall management and coordination of activities as well as the communication between partners. In this way, partners would exchange regular updates on ongoing activities and important deadlines. Partners should provide management feedback on more frequent basis in order to secure the quality of coordination. They should not wait for the surveys to be disseminated and provide feedback to coordination only through survey. There should be more willingness to directly speak to coordinator more frequently.

Clear communication about project activities, deadlines and reminders: further to regular online meetings, e-mail updates with clear instructions about deadlines, and possibly, short reminders before important deadlines would help all partners in the timely implementation of activities.
Partners should remind and check each other depending on their WP leading. They should always send reminders monthly and weekly basis about the upcoming activities and events.

Quality assurance: the information on the impact of activities provided by partners has been rather vague, which is understandable, as many activities have been delayed and so there was not so much to report in this regard. For future QA surveys it will be important that partner try to report as exact as possible impact numbers (e.g. persons reached through training activities), so that the partnership will have a clear picture, both inside and outside for the reports to the European Commission in this regard.

Dissemination efforts should be strengthened by partners; both regarding internal dissemination (raising awareness inside the own organization/HEI) and regarding external dissemination with stakeholders outside the own organization/HEI. The WP Leader of Dissemination has prepared a Dissemination Strategy and a number of products (e.g. project flyer) which can guide these activities. The website and social media pages of DRIVE are already filled with information and updates; in order to present a more complete picture, it would be desirable that all partners contribute to the updates and provide the WP Leader with pictures and short texts on the implementation of project activities at their institution.

Annex

Internal QA and Monitoring Questionnaire
DRIVE Project - Internal QA and Monitoring Questionnaire

DRIVE

Erasmus+ Capacity Building for Higher Education

Internal QA and Monitoring Questionnaire

EVALUATION FORM

Quality Assurance Partner Cooperation and Progress of Project Activities

Period: 15 January 2020 - 15 May 2021

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About this Questionnaire

This questionnaire examines a number of issues relating to the DRIVE project; your answers will be a valuable resource for Annual QA Report. They will also support future implementation of the project by identifying both positive aspects and difficulties in project implementation so far.

For each partner, one questionnaire should be filled in and submitted. Please make sure for each project partner all the engaged participants should fill the questionnaire.

Your responses will be treated in strict confidentiality according to the rule of data protection. They will be aggregated and the identity of those completing particular questionnaires will not be disclosed.

Duration: Approximate 30 minutes

Thank you very much for cooperation and your contribution!

For any doubt or further comment, please refer to Hadis Karatashi hadis.karatashi@universum-ks.org

Organisation's name *

…………………………………………………………………

Implementation at your HEI / organisation
In the following questions, please rate the implementation of activities at YOUR HEI/organisation.

1. How do you rate the work carried out by the project team at your own HEI/organisation? *
   ☐ Excellent
   ☐ Good

☐ Fair
☐ Poor

2. Was the proposed timeline of activities realistic and feasible for Your HEI/organisation? *
    ☐ Yes, it was realistic and feasible
    ☐ No, but there were only minor issues with it
    ☐ No, and there were major problems with it

3. How satisfied are you with the progress of the activities in your institution? *
    ☐ Completely satisfied
    ☐ Very satisfied
    ☐ Moderately satisfied
    ☐ Not at all satisfied

4. Did you have any difficulties/challenges in the implementation of the activities? *
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

4.a If yes - please explain difficulties and challenges you have experienced during the implementation of activities.

5. What is the awareness level about the project in your institution? *
    ☐ Excellent
    ☐ Good
    ☐ Fair
    ☐ Poor

6. Which activities have you implemented in the first year of the project at your HEI/organisation? *

[   ]

Management and Communication

In the following questions, please rate overall management of the project and communication among partners.

7. How do you rate the overall project management and coordination of the project?
8.
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

9. How do you rate overall financial management of the project? *
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

10.   How do you rate overall time management and respect of agreed deadlines in the project? *
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

11. How do you rate the quality of communication among partners and project management team? *
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

12. How do you rate the efficiency of visibility and communication means at project level? *
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

13. Do you have recommendations for improvement of the overall project management and communication among partners?

14. Did your institution undertake any visibility/communication activities to promote DRIVE? *

□ Yes

□ No

14.a Please shortly describe visibility/communication activities undertaken

Outcomes

15. Do the project results achieved up to date meet your initial expectations? Please motivate your answer. *

16. What did your institution learn thanks to this project? *

17. What information, knowledge are still lacking at your institution to improve the implementation of the activities? *

18. Please, provide your recommendations and comments to the future activities to be implemented