CARA SYRIA PROGRAMME

Independent Evaluation

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Contents

Acronyms

ASD	Academic Skills Development
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HE	Higher Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
NW	Northwest
OSF	Open Society Foundation
SP	Syria Programme
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
ToR	Terms of Reference

Acknowledgements

Executive summary

The Cara Syria Programme (Cara SP) aims "to nurture and sustain Syrian academics and facilitate future opportunities by strengthening and connecting them and enabling their continued academic engagement and contribution as a group that is vital to the future of Syria." The evaluation examined the effectiveness, relevance, value for money and impact of the programme. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach combining quantitative analysis and qualitative methods. It focused on the period from January 2020 to end July 2022.

The period 2020-22 was marked by COVID-19 which impacted the programme delivery process, and activities largely moved online. At the same time, the situation in Turkey became more challenging for Syrians with tensions rising and socio-economic conditions worsening. The participants in the programme have been following a range of career pathways in this time including seeking academic jobs in Turkey, supporting the development of Higher Education in non-regime area of Northwest (NW) Syria and some, by looking for opportunities abroad as well as others who have had to find livelihood opportunities outside of academia.

In 2020-22 the Cara team successfully secured funding totaling nearly UK£1.7million. Some funding focused on the arts and humanities, but other funding enabled the programme to continue to provide support to participants from across all subject areas. Cara SP provided opportunities for participants to develop English for Academic Purposes (EAP), for Academic Skills Development (ASD), to undertake research in international teams supported by grants awarded through a competitive process, as well as funding for research on issues relevant to HE in Syria.

Key findings

The Cara SP provided relevant opportunities for over 203 [1] Syrian academics over 2020-22 to sustain and enhance their academic practice with at least 189[2] taking up opportunities actively in the evaluation time period. The flow of outputs from research products, with an increasing number being published in peer-reviewed academic journals, is one indication of its success. There is evidence of improvement in participants' English for Academic Purposes and general academic skills. In particular, the evaluation noted improvements in participants' approach to literature reviews, formulation of research questions, knowledge of data analysis methods and understanding of grant application and publication processes.

Improvements in skill levels are not universal across all participants, with time, their own input, prior experience and English language levels playing a part in the level of change the programme has enabled. However, a significant benefit has been the expansion of opportunities for research with more than 100 participants involved in research projects supported by Cara SP and producing outputs from them over this period. The challenge remains to decide if and when a participant should "graduate" from the programme, for example to seek alternative, non-Cara SP funding for their research.

The programme's activities have remained relevant to the participants even as their career options diversify. Some now focus more on long-term academic careers in Turkey, some on involvement in higher education (HE) in NW Syria, others look for academic opportunities abroad, while yet others

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[1] The number relates to the number of participants registered on Cara database eligible for participation in July 2022.

[2] This refers to the number of participants actively participating in one or more activities of the programme in the evaluation time period 2022-22.

are employed in jobs outside of academia such as non-governmental development and humanitarian agencies. The increased focus on teaching skills in the programme and activities such as curriculum development were welcomed, as well as the opportunities for research that may result in publications, which is a factor considered in all academic job opportunities open to participants. EAP was also very important, as were the international connections fostered by the programme.

However, other international academics such as those involved as mentors in the programme emphasised the value of other outputs and channels such as promotion of research findings in online academic platforms. These provide more immediate means to raise the participants' profile and sometimes maybe a more appropriate target than publication, which can be a slow and difficult process for academics across the board.

The programme was well managed to successfully negotiate the constraints of COVID-19, with most activities moving online. Some evolved during this time, which suited this way of working better e.g., a more structured process to support research grant proposal development. Some of these developments remain relevant.

An impact of the programme are the initiatives now operating independently of Cara SP involving the Syrian participants directly, some set up and managed by supporters of the Cara SP but with independent funding. It is indicative of the skills and value of the participants, as well as the programme's success in catalysing academic collaboration and networks. The participants bring local expertise, access to Syria and local networks, as well as their Syrian experience to research projects. They value the opportunity to be contracted as consultants in their own right, for both economic and professional reasons.

Other aspects of impact relates to the research supported through the Cara SP grants programme, which has contributed to bodies of knowledge and some areas of practice, notably in in food security and agriculture. Another area with potential impact lies in the research produced regarding HE in NW Syrian. It covers key issues relevant to the quality of HE institutions in NW Syria, including gender imbalances amongst both staff and students; academic needs of teaching staff; effectiveness of student record systems; risk-based quality management approaches; and knowledge gaps and psychosocial issues amongst students at the stage of university application. It provides a unique analysis of the context and a baseline to track progress in the quality of its development.

The programme increased its focus on HE in NW Syria with activities moving into a new phase. As well as the research on key issues in HE in NW Syria, a pilot project began during the evaluation period focused on Sham University, also in NW Syria. It is providing technical support e.g. skills development for individual Syrian academics involved in enhancing the quality of the university e.g., in curriculum development and a series of Cara SP roundtables and workshops have been working in this direction in 2022. Importantly the roundtables have involved representation from the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) Council for Higher Education, which oversees HE in NW Syria.

The programme provided excellent value for money with the use of resources maximised. In addition to the programme funding of UK£1.7million over the 30-moth evaluation time period of 2020-22. An impressive additional UK£1.7million *per year* is estimated to be leveraged by the programme through in-kind donations. This comes to approximately UK£4.25million over the 30 month period covered by the evaluation, increasing the scale of resources generated for the programme by a factor of 2.5. The largest in-kind contribution is in the form of time of highly

qualified professionals provided free of charge in support of the programme's aims e.g., in the provision of EAP tutoring, workshops and academic mentors' roles.

The programme has progressed in terms of gender equity with the ratio in male:female participation improving slightly from 7:1 to 5:1. The focus on the arts and humanities and more focus on teaching roles and skills seem to have been important factors in this change. There is still room for further support to women and others who might be marginalised in academia and, in particular, for anyone who might experience discrimination within research teams for their Syrian colleagues, a challenging issue given the depth of cultural norms, but one with which the programme can engage more explicitly.

As the scale of high-quality research being produced increases, the importance of communication of it does too. In addition to research teams own communication plans, Cara SP ran an online symposium (adapted from a planned in-person event) and also developed research policy briefs to this end. The symposium had limited impact in terms of its reach to different audiences, but the style and structure of the briefs and their targeted distribution proved to be an accessible output and process that targets potential interested audiences. It is a model that could be used again distribution to expand awareness of the Cara SP-funded research findings.

As the findings above illustrate the programme is achieving significant results. As well as the scope for more focus on research teams' communication of their research there is potential to increase the communication of the programme's own successes to the wider network of programme stakeholders within and outside the Cara SP. The new website will provide one channel for this along with the social media activities of the programme. There is potential to build on this to enable the wide network to tell the story of the programme with confidence and in engaging and succinct ways helping to raise its profile and awareness of its achievements.

Recommendations

1. *Funding decision* - Make an explicit decision regarding the future of the programme beyond current funding in 2023 and then develop fundraising and resource allocation plans or close-down strategies in line with the decision. The following recommendations assume a continuation of the programme.

2. *Recalibrate programme framework* - Revise the programme's aims and intended outcomes for the next three years to capture the current intended results that the programme aims to achieve ie these might be formulated as the changes in individuals or organisations skills, attitudes, behaviours or relationships and can be at individual, group, organisational or other levels.

3. *Refine and agree at governance level the approach for Cara SP' plan to support to HE in NW Syria over the next three years* - Develop Cara's programmatic strategy for support to HE in NW Syria in the short-medium term with a documented plan for the next 3 years that includes an articulation of Cara's aims (which may including gathering evidence and learning from pilots), milestones to track progress at regular intervals, e.g., six monthly, risk management strategy for identified risks. Include a learning system to gather evidence of impact and lessons. This can be adapted over time as the pilot yields data.

4. *Focus monitoring on outcomes and impact* - Increase the resources allocated to track programme progress focused at outcome and impact levels, which will also aid value for

money analysis. This can include: developing a set of key performance indicators at outcome level (recommended 5-8 indicators); institutionalising self-assessment by participants; creating case studies (longitudinal studies) of success such as individual participants, research teams and/or research projects and their impact to track qualitative change and gather information on what is enabling and hindering impact. Finally, presentation, analysis and discussion of financial data organised by activity or output area (with combined donor contributions over the time period) will aid management and governance of the programme to assess value for money of the programme in terms of cost per activity and working towards costs per outcome.

5. *Communication of success* - Enhance communication of the programme through greater use of the network of supporters, through production of more informal social media content and creation of resources to support staff, governance and supporters to be able to tell the story of the programme and its successes succinctly.

6. *Communication of research* - Increase the focus on research teams' communication of research - follow up team communication strategies, track outputs beyond publications more systematically.

7. *Customisation for career pathways* – Explore further if there are additional ways to focus on activities relevant to different career paths being taken by participants, e.g., EAP focused on assessment methods used in universities in Turkey.

8. *Transparency and equity* - Enhance transparency by documenting the rationale for the allocation of resources to individuals and selection, if and when relevant, of institutions to benefit from the programme. Sustain support for any disadvantaged participants with material assistance e.g., laptops. Create a complaints and accountability system for participants to report any experiences of discrimination and develop systems to respond to any experiences.

9. *Cara SP role in facilitation of partnerships* - Make Cara SP's brokering role more systematic and explicit alerting organisations to the potential role the Cara SP can provide for individuals and organisations wishing to partner with Syria academics for academic purposes.

10. *Team communication and integration* - Enhance programme team effectiveness through use of new communication channels such as Teams or similar system.

11. *Capturing learning for future models* - Accelerate the process to create resources for future Cara programmes such as the creation of a toolkit.

1. Introduction

1. The Cara Syria Programme (Cara SP) was established in 2016. It aims "to nurture and sustain Syrian academics and facilitate future opportunities by strengthening and connecting them and enabling their continued academic engagement and contribution as a group that is vital to the future of Syria." It is anticipated this is achieved by supporting professional development and connections, as well as through the facilitation of research collaboration amongst Syrian academics in exile and with colleagues from the wider international academic communities. The evaluation examines the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and value for money and impact of the programme with analysis of factors contributing to and those that hinder impact. It concludes with recommendations for the future.

2. This is the third independent evaluation of the programme. It focuses on the period from January 2020 to end July 2022 but is mindful that preceding phases of the programme contributed to some results. Where appropriate, these earlier events are taken into account. During the 2020-22 period the Cara SP team successfully secured funding totalling nearly UK £1.7million. The total comprised three core grants equalling UK£1.5million from the Open Society Fund and Mellon Foundation (dedicated to Arts, Humanities and humanistic social science-related work) and ten additional grants for specific research-related and academic skills development activities that came to just over £180,000. These figures include some grants that began shortly before the beginning of 2020.[3]

3. The Cara SP was organised around six strands of related activities:
   - English language for academic purposes (EAP) (Strand 1)
   - Academic skills development (ASD) (Strand 2)
   - Research incubation visits to the UK (RIVs) (Strand 3)
   - Cara-commissioned research (CCR) focused on Higher Education (HE) in Syria (Strand 4)
   - The Syria Research Fellowship Scheme (SRFS) offering research grants (Strand 5)
   - Arts, humanities and humanistic social science-focused activities including research (Strand 6).

4. The previous evaluation, completed in January 2020, made a positive assessment of the progress of the innovative programme and recommended 11 actions for the further development of the

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[3] *Funding 2020-22 – Total (1,695,431.25)*
   - **OSF Phase 3.** £501,427.37 (*Apr.2019 to May 2020 Extended to Jun.2021*)
   - **OSF Phase 4.** £304,333 (*Oct.2020 to Sep.2022*)
   - **Mellon Phase 2.** £889,670.88 (*Oct.2019 to Sep.2021 Extended to Dec.2022*)

Funding Third Party (Total £181,207.91)
   - **Reading Uni.** (Internal GCRF) Covid & Language £3,346 (2019-20)
   - **Edinburgh Uni**. (AHRC) Syrian Food Futures **£93,564.53** (*Sep.2019-Aug.2021*)
   - **Kent Uni.** (Brit. Ac. 'Ac. Writing Workshop Grant') **£19,260.00** (*Jan.-Dec.20 Extended to Mar.2022*)
   - **WaterFOre** (UKI grant) **£10,300.30** (*Apr.-Oct.2020 Extended to Dec.2020*)
   - **Edinburgh Uni.** (AHRC) Slavery within the Turkish Agricultural sector. **£22,487.08** (*Oct.20-Apr.21*)
   - **Sussex Uni.** (Internal GCRF) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Podcast Pilot) **£17,000** (*Dec.20-Jul.21*)
   - **Sussex Uni.** (Impact Grant) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Podcast) **£4,500** (*Sep-Dec2021*)
   - **Sussex Uni.** (Internal) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Video) **£7,750** (*Mar.-Jul.2022*)
   - **Sussex Uni.** (Internal) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Focus Group, Turkey) **£1,000** (*2 Jul.2022*)
   - **Sussex Uni.** (Internal) **Value Chain £2,000** (*Mar.-Jul.22*)

programme. Recommendations related to the development of longer-term strategy, resolution of some tensions between competing programme aims, e.g., increased number of participants versus scale of support to individuals, and to increase a) transparency in decision-making, b) attention to communication of research, and c) the collection of data to support the assessment of progress in the programme. All recommendations were accepted by Cara and there has been some progress in addressing them, though not all are complete. These recommendations still stand and should be taken in combination with those of this report.

5. Key external developments relevant to the programme during the past three years included:

- *COVID 19 pandemic,* which prevented face-to-face workshops in Istanbul and Syrian academic research incubation visits to the UK for two years. In response, activities were deferred or moved online. Academics in both Turkey and the UK lived under lockdown conditions and universities and other organisations developed remote ways of working.

- *Sustained instability in Syria* preventing return of refugees, so many SP participants did not have a choice to return to Syria.

- *Increasing hostility within Turkey to Syrians* particularly in 2022 as the economic situation in the country worsened and the forthcoming national election in 2023 approaches. This has resulted in increased day-to-day racism, regular attacks on Syrians and heightened negative discourse in the media and political debate relating to refugees. There are also plans announced by Turkish President Erdogan for the return of large numbers of Syrian refugees, potentially at a scale of one million or more. These combined to increase Syrians' sense of insecurity in Turkey, which has become less of a safe haven from the Syrian conflict.

- *Changes in the socio-economic conditions in Turkey* have increased the cost of living for Syrians there, e.g., the end of free university education for Syrians and reductions in humanitarian assistance, as well as high rates of inflation affecting everyone in Turkey.

- The *reduction in global attention to Syria and* consequent cuts to aid focused on Syria as other conflicts, notably the western exit from Afghanistan and upsurge of war in Ukraine, has absorbed global attention and resources.

- *Reductions in UK Government development spending* that have impacted research funding including some grants from which Cara SP was due to benefit such as the Global Challenge Research Fund.

Significant developments in Cara include:

a. the major increase in numbers of applicants to the Cara Fellowship Programme following the developments in Afghanistan and Ukraine conflicts

b. the UK government funding of a specific fellowship programme for Ukrainian researchers at risk in cooperation with the British Academy being administered by Cara.

2. Methodology

6. **The evaluation has used a mixed methods approach combining quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative methods**. Key activities included.

   a) Document review – including of programme proposals and reports, Cara SP grant guidelines for proposals and reporting, reports on events, selected research outputs and more.

   b) Analysis of data on participant engagement, grant applications, dissemination data.

   c) Analysis of financial data on programme expenditure and budgets.

   d) Observation of Gaziantep-based Round Table and 'Developing Educational Developers' workshop in July 2022, which brought together Syrian academics mainly from Sham University in the non-regime NW of Syria, and the Head of the Syrian Interim Government Higher Education Council, along with UK academics and experts, to discuss challenges and solutions to the development and quality of Higher Education (HE) in NW Syria.

   e) 18 interviews with Syrian programme participants. The selection of Syrian participants for interview aimed to reflect a range of levels or participation in the programme and times when they joined the programme. It included representatives of those who joined in its first years and have remained active in the programme as well as more recent participants.

   f) 22 interviews with Cara staff and programme partners including:

      i. Cara management and governance - Cara CEO, Chair of Cara Syria Programme Steering Committee (who is also Chair of Cara and the SP Grant Awarding Committee) and Cara Middle East Adviser[4] and the Syria Programme Team

      ii. Syria Programme partners and supporters, including EAP tutors, academics involved as research mentors, SP steering group members and organisations recruiting Cara Syria Programme participants as consultants or in other SP facilitated roles, hosts for research incubation visits, workshop facilitators (in Turkey and online) and those delivering webinars and e-soirees sessions.

   interviews were carried out face-to-face in Gaziantep and the remainder remotely through Zoom. A full list of interviewees is in Annex 3.

7. Strengths of the methodology relate to it being the third evaluation enabling some aspects of the programme to be tracked over the entire programme period. This is important given the potential cumulative nature of the benefits of the programme for Syrian participants who have been part of it from an early stage.

8. The constraints of the evaluation methodology relate mainly to its scope and scale. The evaluation could not interview all participants, partners and supporters of the programme. Those selected represented a range of participant types, partner and supporter to provide a range of perspectives and experiences of the programme.

9. Some types of financial analysis were constrained by the way that financial data is organised. The programme tracks expenditure against donor budget categories to facilitate monitoring and reporting on donor grants. However, differences in donor grant timelines and categories for expenditure make it difficult to aggregate expenditure across donor sources by category and by year, which would be needed for some types of financial analysis, e.g., cost per participant per year and

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[4] The Cara Middle East Adviser is the lead Syria Programme adviser and referred to as such at times in this report.

other cost-efficiency or value for money analyses. However, the evaluation undertook some analysis of the allocation of resources using donor proposal budgets as an indication of resource allocation and their validity was checked in interviews regarding any adjustments made during programme implementation. Later, recommendations consider the potential for other financial data and analysis to be available to support programme management.

10. Other constraints relate to the way that other data is managed and presented. For example, while a full list of outputs of the programme is available it is difficult to match the list of research outputs to a research project and/or programme participant (they are organised in lengthy lists that would need time-consuming analysis to match to project grants). This is discussed further in the section on effectiveness and relevance where appropriate.

11. Some constraints are related to the nature of the programme and, in particular, the complexity of assessment of academic skills development. This is not a difficulty confined to this programme, but it is made all the more challenging by the nature of the programme participants, i.e. some senior, professional academics who would be resistant to regular testing to track progress. This issue has been discussed in previous evaluations and remains a challenge, discussed again later.

3. Effectiveness

3.1. English for academic purposes (EAP) (Strand 1)

> **Key finding: The Cara SP provided relevant opportunities for participants to improve English skills for academic purposes. Participants who were able to dedicate time to study and find opportunities to practice demonstrated significant improvement, but progress is inconsistent and not feasible for all.**

Activities and participation

12. Cara records show that 152 Syrian participants are currently active in EAP. Participants are assessed regularly, informally through their tutors' and for those who choose to, through online Aptis tests every six months (increasing to every ten months in later 2022). These are provided by the British Council at cost. New EAP activities were established in 2020-22 in addition to the weekly online one-to-one EAP tutor/SP participant sessions, these include weekly online group sessions split by EAP level and weekly 2-hour online group English sessions.

13. In 2022, the Cara Syria Programme brokered access to two UK universities' (Leeds and USW) English Pre-sessional (10-week and 6-week) and General English (10-week) summer courses with full fee waivers and university accommodation. This support for participants with higher levels of EAP skills was intended to enable them to take up further academic opportunities. Other such opportunities are being sought for 2023.

Results

Improved EAP skills

14. Assessment of EAP skills based on an Aptis tests show high levels of variation in participants' progress. For example, the latest assessment in 2022 of 42 self-selected participants, 43% of

them increased their score since a previous test six months earlier; for 7% of the group the increase was sufficient to move up a level in the Cara SP EAP ratings, which are based on the Aptis scores. However, 38% decreased their score and of these 10% of participants tested were moved down a level. [5]

15. All participants interviewed for the programme reported their own assessment that they had improved English skills as a result of participation in the programme, even when their scores did not indicate it. Indeed, their sustained participation in the regular classes, even when not active in other parts of the programme, indicates their perception of some benefits. Participants welcomed the additional opportunities for practice including English classes, held in-person in Turkey before COVID and then online.

16. There are plentiful EAP resources online for participants to access, but tutor feedback indicates that participants make limited use of these. However, they estimate about a third of participants listen back to their own weekly 1-2-1 sessions, when these are recorded based on the tutor/tutees' choice of whether to do so.

17. The greatest variable in terms of participants' performance, as judged by these tests, is judged by tutors and participants alike to be the time they are able to allocate to learning. Motivation and aptitude for language also influence performance, but time for study is the key factor. Those who progress well, tend to be those who study between weekly sessions with tutors, or who have opportunities to practice their language skills, for instance in the English-language environments of NGOs where some work. However, for many, safeguarding this time for EAP has proved difficult.

18. For those who have benefitted from improved EAP, the impacts include:
    - access to certain jobs with this as a criterion (e.g. universities and NGOs in Turkey)
    - eligibility for academic opportunities including with Cara e.g. research incubation visits
    - ability to undertake academic activities such as to include English language texts in literature reviews, which in turn can improve the quality of research
    - participation in international academic circles e.g. conferences and online platforms.

Sustained provision of activities

19. The supply of tutors has continued as the number of Cara SP participants has increased. More than 50 new tutors joined the programme in the past 12-18 months. This has enabled most participants to be matched to a tutor relatively quickly, although there have been delays of up to four months, particularly in summer months when EAP tutors are particularly busy in their universities and so less likely to undertake new activities such as tutoring.

20. Factors sustaining the tutors has been Cara's provision of information regularly about the wider programme and university support in some cases, though this varies. The length of tutors' engagement is noticeable with most remaining for one year or more and many have maintained relationships for over three years. The evolving nature of these relationships is an interesting process and a product of the programme in itself.

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[5] Cara SP reports that technical issues may have affected these results.

21. Tutors have suggested the development of "resource banks" of tutor resources particularly those that are discipline specific, including authentic academic texts and videos would be benefit them. Given that Cara SP team report there is such a resource bank, it would be valuable to explore if all tutors know this and/or why they do not use it.

3.2 Academic skills development (ASD)

Key finding: Participants' academic skills improved in terms of people's understanding of and ability to meet international academic standards and processes such as grant applications and publications. It was not possible to quantify the scale and extent of these.

Activities and participation

22. The Cara SP provides opportunities to develop academic skills in formal and informal "teaching" sessions or learning opportunities provided in-person and online for groups. Some of these learning opportunities are open to all and some focus on specific, e.g., an online writing course restricted to top EAP level and sessions for those successful in securing research grants. Significant adaptations were made during the COVID-19 period when all activities moved online.

23. New formal learning opportunities were devised by Cara SP's network of tutors and volunteer supporters during 2020-22 together with Cara SP. Some of these developments are in response to challenges and constraints of the Covid-19 context (c and d below). The members of Cara SP network , referred to by Cara SP team as the SP Peer Review College largely provided these inputs voluntarily without payment and they include:
   a) Development of an eight-module online 'Foundation Course' (FC) focusing on fundamental research concepts that all were encouraged to do, but which is mandatory for all new participants and all wishing to submit a research proposal in response to SP research grant calls. Participants produce a reflection piece in order to qualify for the certificate of completion. Cara SP Academic Skills Development (ASD) Steering Group member review and respond individually to each of the final reflections, which in turn both highlights participants' areas of need and interest and perceived benefits.
   b) A weekly 'E-learn Soiree' series on a range of subjects, including those that respond to the COVID-19 context such as on remote teaching and remote data collection.
   c) A 12-week series online focused on arts and humanities learning and teaching.
   d) Academic writing workshop series.

24. At least 175[6] of the programme participants participated in one or more of these activities beyond the EAP one-to-one sessions(at least 14 more participated only in the EAP sessions in this time period). E-soirees reached the largest number of participants with 103 participants joining at least one e-soiree in 2021 and each participant who joined e-soirees attended, on average six per year. Participation levels vary according to participants' interest in the subject and feasibility to join, with levels of participation in an individual event ranging from three to 38 participants per session. Average attendance increased in 2021 from 16

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[6] This number refers to the number of participants who took part in Cara programme activities in addition to EAP in the evaluation time period:Source Cara data.

participants per session in 2020 to over 21 in 2021, maybe reflecting everyone's shift to remote ways of working generally as COVID-19 restrictions continued to impact life.

Results

25. Some participants' academic skills have increased. This assessment is based on feedback from tutors, mentors, academics running workshops and various courses for the programme, and the SP Grant Awarding Committee. Key areas of improvements noted were a) skills in data analysis b) knowledge of how to undertake, and subsequent quality, of literature reviews c) participants' formulation of research questions d) knowledge of data collection and analysis methods e) academic writing skills, f) understanding of ethical processes and research publication processes. The Selection Committee members, in particular, noted significant improvements in the quality of proposals being submitted for funding in response to the SP's research grant calls.

3.3 Academic skills development through practice

Key finding: Opportunities to participate in research enhanced participants' academic skills. Teams produced an increasing number of high-quality research outputs. The collaborative approach to research contributed to the establishment of Syrian and international collaborative partnerships.[7]

Activities

26. The programme provided practical opportunities for participants to enhance their academic skills through practice, such as Cara SP-facilitated research incubation visits and group research project. There has been a total of 23 research incubation visits (RIV) during the programme's lifetime, but predominantly before this evaluation's time period due to restrictions on travel from COVID-19. Only two RIVs occurred during the evaluation time period, one in person in 2020 and one remotely in 2021. New RIVs are being set up for the latter part of 2022 and early 2023 now that travel restrictions have been lifted. All of them, including those that took place outside the evaluation period, are noted here because their benefits can take some time to emerge. In the 2020-22 time period, there were 4 new grant rounds with 32 teams having been awarded grants at the time of writing (awards from the latest, April 2022, grant round are still pending).[8]

Results

27. 105 participants were members of research teams awarded grants in competitive processes 2020-22. The highest number resulted from the December 2020 call for proposals. This was a significant increase in the number of participants involved in research funded through earlier grant rounds. In other rounds, typically 20-40 people were part of successful teams in each round. The increase was due in part to the increased number of grants available (made possible by reducing the size of a grant) and by the December 2020 grant being open to participants and proposals of all disciplines.

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[7] These are activities mainly from the Strands 4 and 5 in the programme.
[8] 10 in Aug 2020, 12 in Dec 2020, 10 in Sept 2021, and a new set of awards will be made in October 2022 following selection of proposals submitted following the April 2022 grant round call

28. The participants interviewed for the evaluation, highly valued the opportunity to undertake research in their own subject area supported by the Cara SP, allowing them to pursue their own interests as well as for its benefits to their careers.

29. 34 participants undertook research commissioned by Cara as part of its strand of work focused on Syria HE (strand 3). In these projects, participants and tutors noted the benefits gained included skills in teamwork, multi- and inter-disciplinary working, understanding of different methodologies and methods, as well as a sense of contributing to their country's HE and other areas of life, valuable but distinct from their livelihood, career and personal aims.

30. Furthermore, 119 programme participants were part of teams applying in a competitive process for SP research grants for the first time.[9]

31. The quality of proposals being submitted for research funding has improved significantly over time. Adaptations to the Cara SP approach in the past three years that have contributed to this result and enhanced the learning process include:
    a) Mentors' involvement in proposal development
    b) A more structured online proposal development process.
    c) A chance for proposals to be resubmitted in response to feedback from the grants committee and independent expert reviewers
These steps which increased and further structured the support in proposal-writing process preceding submission has some value and even unsuccessful teams benefit from the feedback they receive on their proposal.[10]

32. Cara research programmes are producing an impressive range of outputs. More than 105 participants have been part of the production of at least one output from a research project since the beginning of the programme including publication in peer-reviewed journals, briefing papers and presentations at conferences.

33. Publications are an important product for participants contributing to their ability to secure, retain and progress in academic jobs in Turkey, and potentially elsewhere, as they also help to build an international profile (discussed in following section on impact). However, many of the UK academics interviewed were keen to emphasise the relevance of alternative outputs other than publication in peer-reviewed journals. They emphasised the challenge for everyone, including well-established international academics to succeed in publication in high quality journals and flagged that other products maybe be equally or even better to demonstrate Syrian participants' skills and raise their profiles, e.g., participation in online platforms and sharing resources in platforms that promote grey literature. One response to this challenge that the programme team developed was the production of an SP Briefing Paper Series to target policymakers and practitioners.

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[9] Strand 5 activities in the programme.
[10] In the first instance from the mentor supported proposal development/writing stage and then from independent expert reviewers (IERs) and selection committee feedback. Each submission is reviewed by two IERs who are experts in the study area.

34. Drawbacks of the focus on publications and use of this as a means to indicate academic skills development of an individual and, collectively, as a proxy for programme effectiveness include:

a) First, while publication may indicate high quality, lack of publication may not necessarily indicate low quality, there are many reasons articles may be rejected;

b) Second, it is difficult to know the extent to which individuals in research teams contribute to the final products. Articles are the result of team effort, and the extent of individual inputs is now known. Teams report they can vary significantly.

c) Thirdly, some mentors are highly involved in the publications and report that they take on a significant role in ensuring the quality of final product that achieves publication.

d) Fourth, there is often not a publication (journal article published) for three years or more from the beginning of the process to secure a grant to publication, so it does not serve to track individuals' progress during the research project.

Thus, while data on levels of publications is very useful, particularly if linked to research projects and individuals', it has limitations for tracking progress in participants' skills and programme effectiveness. Additional indicators are needed to track the process more fully and rapidly.

3.4 Networks and collaboration

Key finding: Cara SP has contributed to the establishment of new partnerships and networks between Syrian academics as well as with international academics.

Activities

35. Cara has built an impressive network of UK-based academics willing to support the programme. Over 400 UK academics now make up the SP Peer Review College from which mentors, hosts for research incubation visits, independent expert reviewers and people for other support roles are drawn.

36. Opportunities within the programme for building partnerships include the research projects themselves, which are all undertaken by teams involving a group of Syrian participants and at least one UK academic in the role of mentor or a similar role and so provide a space for relationships to build over time. Other Cara SP learning opportunities also enable Syrian and other international academics to meet online and in-person.

37. Cara SP team has also supported connections between organisations, including UK universities, and individual academics and participants on an individual or group basis. These include initiatives Cara SP terms "spin-offs", which are independently funded activities often originating from a Cara SP project or collaborative partnerships formed though the programme. Cara support has been in brokering, facilitation and service provision. Sometimes this has included Cara SP being a party to a new collaboration and, in these cases, Cara might directly contract and facilitate payment of Syrian academics where they lack necessary institutional affiliation. Cara SP team also provided guidance to new initiatives. e.g., on salary levels, visas, other practical steps such as visa processes and help to identify Syrian academics with the appropriate skills sets for UK organisations' initiatives.

Results

38. The evaluation was not able to identify the total number of collaborative partnerships that have materialised as a result of the programme, because some occur independently but notes that over 30 participants have been involved in initiatives termed "spin-offs" i.e. projects funded independently of Cara SP involving four academic organisations (universities of Edinburgh, Kent, Sussex and OU).[11] Additional projects where participants have been commissioned as consultants were shared with the evaluation e.g. as advisors and facilitators of a kitchen garden project in NW Syria.

39. A number of valuable academic initiatives have evolved from participants' involvement in the Cara SP but which now operate independently:
     - international partnerships formulated as mentor relationships (or other relationships with UK-based academics in facilitator or similar roles) have evolved into an international academic partnership of peers with each partner bringing different skills and experiences. The contribution of Syrian academics in the research and other projects tends to focus on their experience of, and access to, the Syrian context. International cooperation is continuing in research in areas that include agriculture, archaeology and literature.
     - groups of participants have set up independent consultancies or NGOs such as the Syrian Academic Expertise (SAE https://sae-afs.org/) which is a group of participants who worked on Cara SP research projects and operate independently now on food security-related work.
     - individuals who have also been on the Cara SP now working together to establish and sustain new HE institutions in NW Syria e.g., faculty members at Sham University amongst others.

40. Some opportunities grew from organisations such as the Open University (OU) approaching Cara for advice or signposting to possible candidates for projects they have for academics at risk or who have been displaced. The OU has provided one consultancy contract to an SP participant to undertake an OU curriculum development work ie an OU online Arabic and Culture course.

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[11] Examples include Sussex University's GCRF-funded 'Agricultural Voices Syria' (AVS) ; Syrian Food Futures/University of Edinburgh; the Impact of Covid19 on Food Security/University of Edinburgh; Water Purification at the Household Level in Syria/WaterFore; Integration of Refugees through the Mardin Tourist Sector/Kent University; Covid19 and Modern-day Slavery in the Agriculture Sector/University of Edinburgh; Agricultural Voices Syria - Knowledge transfer to Syrian farmers/Sussex University.

3.5 Enabling academic participation

Key finding: Cara SP facilitated sustained academic participation of Syrian academics through an increasingly diverse range of opportunities and support.

Activities

41. Cara SP expanded the ways in which it facilitates sustained academic participation in the evaluation time period. Some of the key approaches include the following (with the number of participants benefitting from these noted in brackets)[12].

    - Facilitating fee waivers and support (from Universities of South Wales and Kent) for up to 12 participants per year in applications for the *Advance HE* HEA fellowship programme. Advance HEA is a UK-based NGO which supports HE globally and describes the Fellowship as "an international recognition of a commitment to professionalism in teaching and learning in higher education and demonstrates that your practice is aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). It is a standard requirement for academic employment in the UK HE sector and increasingly elsewhere." [13]

    - Promoting visibility of the research produced and the Syrian academics who produced it through an online symposium (adapted from original in-person plan due to Covid-19) supported by the British Academy and Royal Society, as well as financial support for attendance at international conferences including in Italy, Switzerland and Turkey (7)

    - Enabling access to additional skills development opportunities necessary to take up further opportunities e.g. fee waiver and financial support to do an IELTS exam (1), brokering UK/Turkish co-PhD supervision agreements (2), facilitation of fee waivers for UK PhDs and masters (3), English pre-sessional courses at Leeds and USW (3).

    - Access to online resources through waived costs including Cambridge University Press (CUP) 'Cambridge English Empower' licences for the weekly one-to-one online EAP levels 1, 2 and 3 sessions; Elsevier 22 ScienceDirect' *pro bono* licences offered (up to 22 participants at any one time) and reduced book costs.

    - Supporting 35 Cara SP participants to secure honorary fellow status (remote) at University of South Wales (USW) providing a highly valued university email address, and considered part of the university faculty, which in turn enables access to USW's online resources. The SP is exploring replicating this model in other UK universities.

Results

42. The results of these initiatives are difficult to quantify beyond the number of people assisted in the ways noted above. Over the longer-term it will be possible to see the contribution these different opportunities make to an academic's career and participation in the international-academic community. At this stage it is possible to say that the Syrian academics themselves see these opportunities as a significant step towards more equal partnership in the international community.

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[12] The list is illustrative, not exhaustive
[13] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/ HEA Fellowship

43. However, it is not feasible to provide these opportunities to everyone nor necessarily appropriate for all, with English language skills being a particularly important factor for eligibility.

3.6 Research and analysis for Syrian Higher Education

Key finding: Cara SP effectively identified key issues relevant to Syrian HE and produced high quality analysis of the situation and associated issues. The programme is moving to a new stage of action-research focused on supporting the quality of HE in NW Syria. This presents Cara with choices for its future strategy. Feasibility and risk management will be important factors guiding which choices are made in the strategy.

Activities

44. An approach of the programme has been to use group research projects to explore aspects of Syrian Higher Education. It identified five key areas for research in 2019, which produced research reports, which were they adapted to be journal articles and published in 2022. These focused on gender imbalances; professional development needs of teaching staff; effectiveness of student record systems; risk management quality assurance models; and core knowledge gaps amongst students at the time of their university registration.

45. The programme has now expanded from the production of research and analysis of these issues to considering how to address them through an action-research pilot focused on quality management of higher education. The scope of the work on HE is again limited to the non-regime NW of Syria and one pilot institution, Sham University, selected because a significant number (18) of SP participants cross the Turkish/Syrian border into the area, to support teaching there. A roundtable was held in July 2022 with SP participants who work at Sham University, the Head of the Syrian Interim Government HE Council[14] and selected UK academics and experts. Participants discussed the research findings and ways to address raising the quality of HE in NW Syria. In addition, a 'Developing Educator Developers' workshop was run for many of the roundtable participants and other senior faculty from Sham University, to work on issues around curriculum development and quality control in this conflict-affected context.

Results

46. The programme has been effective in identifying key issues relevant to the quality of Syrian HE in NW Syria. It produced high quality analysis of five key areas evidenced by the publication of the research articles in the International Journal of Educational Research Open (IJEDRO).

47. The research projects effectively provided:
    a) a vehicle for academic skills development, including working in inter-disciplinary research teams;
    b) analysis of the state of HE in NW Syria and increased awareness of needs;

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[14] This is the body that licences and monitors HEIs in NW Syria

c) a basis from which to identify potential ways forward to improve and/or support HE in NW Syria; and

d) opportunities for new networks to develop between Syrian academics, as well as between Syrian and other international academics (see above).

48. All those interviewed for the evaluation welcomed this broadening of the programme's activities. They highlighted the importance of developing high quality HE options for the next generation both to increase the capacity of the country, and as part of a strategy to provide alternatives to young people from direct participation in the conflict. A key focus they advised should be on the development of the quality of Syrian HE opportunities for students confined within the region, to allow them to gain qualifications recognised outside of Syria.

49. The Cara SP team has a strong awareness of, and approach to, management of risks associated with work within NW Syria. Evaluation interviewees noted that the risks range from the security of individuals (Syrian participants) who are active in NW Syria, e.g., in teaching roles, reputation risks to Cara if it becomes associated or perceived to be associated with any particular political grouping, and challenges for Cara SP team to monitor the context, and progress and impact of Cara SP's interventions on the quality of HE in NW Syria, because Cara SP staff do not travel inside the country, in line with the organisation's security guidance.

50. However, there is not a documented risk analysis to accompany the work areas though its activities are reported on in the regular reports to the programme's governance structures.

51. Cara has a range of options for its future work focused on improving the quality of HE provided by institutions in NW Syria. These include the following, but this is not an exhaustive list, nor are they mutually exclusive. Options being considered include:
- capacity development of individuals who are actively involved in HE in Syria
- a focus on the institutional level, i.e., specific organisations in NW Syria providing HE or with a range of roles. e.g., standard setting.
- Facilitation of links between individuals and/or institutions in NW Syria and the UK.

52. Activities are currently undertaken within the ongoing programme framework. There is potential to develop a specific project focused on quality of HE in NW Syria as either a standalone or integral component to the wider Syria programme.

53. Options for the future direction of Cara's work in NW Syria present choices about which institutions, which individuals it supports and what explicit outcomes it seeks to achieve. The current pilot approach focused on Sham University will provide some experience to build from if systems are set up to track evidence of its relevance, effectiveness and impact.[15]

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[15] Sham is running 4 outlined workshops in the lead up to the next Round Table in the UK, with a reflective report after each and fortnightly online meetings with those involved in the July 2022 RT and the Sep. 2022 Planning meeting. A road map has been drafted to guide the process.

3.7 Equity and gender

3.7.1 Female participation

Key finding: The Cara SP has worked hard in efforts to achieve gender equity in the programme through practical and moral support to enable women's participation in all activities. However, challenges remain to women's participation, possibly exacerbated by COVID lockdowns and the reliance on online approaches. The Cara SP approach to actively challenge any sexism or other discrimination experienced by individuals in Cara SP teams could be more explicit and systematic.

54. The Cara SP has always been aware of the need to take gender issues into account and sought to enable equal participation of women and men in the programme. Challenges have included a lack of clarity regarding the numbers and location of female academics and then designing a programme that enables their full participation.

55. A number of measures are in place with the aim to enable women's participation that take into account their frequent additional family responsibilities over and above their male counterparts, e.g., provision of childcare at workshops. However up to 2020 the male: female ratio remained stubbornly imbalanced at 7:1.

Results

56. By 2022, the male to female participation ratio improved from 7:1 to 5:1 and includes some women-led research projects. Contributing factors include the focus on activities and subjects with higher participation rates by women including arts and humanities. In addition, the expansion of numbers of research projects overall and an encouragement to have some gender balance in research teams proved beneficial. These developments are welcome, but the challenge remains.

Challenges to equity

57. *Online methods exposing unequal access to technology and time at home* - The shift to completely relying on online approaches during the height of COVID-19 restrictions provided an opportunity to explore if this way of working had any differential impact on male and female participation. Previous evaluation interviewees had put forward a view that a reliance on workshops in Istanbul was an obstacle to women's participation because they were reliant on having to negotiate with their families and/or husbands' permission to attend. However, analysis of participation in online events do not show any greater participation by women. For example, analysis of participation in e-soirees show 14% of participants were female, so in line with the overall participation rates including in in-person workshops and not showing any increase in women's participation in online activities.

58. Female interviewees reported challenges to online work particularly during COVID 19 with additional family responsibilities in lockdowns, difficulties to access laptops for participation as they were shared across the family and for example children needed them for schoolwork. In addition, while they reported that negotiating access to Istanbul workshops could be challenging, once there, they could concentrate for 3 days on academic work. However, securing time for more frequent, shorter online activities and giving them undivided attention in the middle of a busy house was more difficult. In this occasion online learning did not overcome the underlying inequities in women's access to opportunities.

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Further analysis of this would be possible to see if factors such as different timing of events might support more women's participation.

59. *Imbalances and tensions in research teams* - Evaluation interviewees revealed a range of experiences among women who participated in Cara SP research teams. These varied from positive experiences of full and equal participation to at least one female academic's reported experience of explicit sexism and discrimination. Discrimination was reported in the sexist language used by male Syrian team members, the unequal distribution of work and allocation of credit for the research (with some male members who were reported to have taken on little work in the team taking equal credit for the products). The evaluation was not able to validate or triangulate this report beyond discussion with the Cara SP team who confirmed it was certainly possible.

60. These situations are difficult for the Cara SP team to deal with because they often reflect challenges and experiences that stem from deeper attitudes, behaviours and norms within Syrian culture and academia. Also, while Cara SP team reported it will directly address participants' displaying sexist behaviour, this is not always the route that the participant experiencing some form of sexism wants.

61. Some options going forward include a) Developing strategies for how to challenge any direct sexism or other discrimination displayed - important for a programme seeking to support academics to meet international standards of academic practice, which includes inclusiveness and respect across difference; b) consideration of provision of additional technology e.g. laptops for women if home-based/online participation is the way they will participate (some laptops already purchased for female participants); c) making explicit the Cara SP policy of non-acceptance of any discriminatory behaviour and making accessible the means for raising complaints or disclosing experiences of discrimination on any grounds.

3.7.2 Gender lens in research focus

Key finding: A significant contribution of Cara SP has been the focus on gender issues in HE in Syria and also gender questions in research it supported.

62. Other aspects of the Cara SP have effectively taken gender into account and made significant contributions. These include:
a) *research which explored barriers to female participation in HE in Syria* and made recommendations on how to address these. Some of these are already being put into action in one institution, (Sham University), which participants reported has established a female-only space and female dormitories.
b) *gender-focused research* funded through Cara SP research grants with research projects including the impact of war on Syrian women's writing, women as NGO leaders in Turkey and Syria

63. Other characteristics that impact equity in life and academia have also been considered in Cara SP research, including into disability-related questions and the situation of minorities in Syria. These issues have largely been enabled by the focus on arts and humanities, as well as the application of a gender lens on higher education.

4. Relevance

Key finding: The Cara SP aims and activities continue to be relevant to the diversifying career pathways open to and being taken by the participants.

Context

64. This section considers the relevance of the programme activities and strategy at this point, which saw the Syrian conflict enter its 12th year and many of the programme participants in Turkey for seven years or more. Over the years in Turkey, a significant number of participants applied for and gained Turkish citizenship. This provides rights and opportunities not open to them under their temporary protection status, e.g., international travel is easier, and they can apply for all jobs open to Turkish citizens and receive equal conditions such as pay. However, a Syrian academic has to reapply for any university job they have already secured under their temporary protection status, so a risky choice economically because there is no guarantee of success on reapplication under a new status.[16]

65. There have been some positive developments in HE in NW Syria with seven new institutions opening since 2015, providing some opportunities for Syrian academics (in teaching or other roles) as well as the next generation for study. However, the new institutions are mainly small (under 1000 students) and not all yet open.

Syrian programme participants' priorities, options and career pathways

66. The evaluation noted three academic career pathways being pursued by the participants. These groups are not mutually exclusive and other categories for analysis exist, but they serve as a means to explore the programme's relevance. Three main emerging paths noted were participant who:
    - Focus on academic careers in Turkey
    - Focus on the development of HE in NW Syria
    - Aim to participate in international academia with a view to move outside of Turkey (and not planning to return to Syria).

67. Several factors influence the feasibility of the different options for individuals including their:
    - level of English
    - Turkish citizenship status and standard of Turkish language
    - preferences in terms of academic roles, e.g., between research and teaching
    - involvement in the emerging Syrian higher education institutions in NW Syria influenced in part by their own Syrian academic networks
    - family commitments and constraints these may place, e.g., travel options or indeed drivers, e.g., to move for other opportunities including for children.

Relevance of Cara SP activities

The activities in the Cara SP continued to be relevant to these different career choices. In particular, participants all noted the importance of EAP and their own publication record for all three career options. The greater focus on teaching skills in the past three years of the Cara SP

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[16] With Turkish citizenship their annual renewable contract is terminated, and they are then required to sit, in Turkish, exams that Turks have to pass in order to be considered for employment in a university.

has been valued by many participants who predominantly depend on teaching roles for their livelihood. The research, academic skills development and potential to produce research that is published were also seen as relevant to these careers. Participants noted also the credibility that the UK-academic links can bring to their role in Turkey, e.g. if they can call on their contacts to participate in wider activities of the university, as some individuals have done, such as providing advice for courses Syrian academics are running.

68. Participants noted some points that are particular to their career role and have relevance to the programme's future activities:
    - Those focused on careers in Turkey highlighted the importance of the specific English language tests used by Turkish universities and the importance of Turkish language skills for their career. They suggested the programme have some focus on this and/or that EAP tutors become familiar with them.
    - Those focused on the development of HE in NW Syria emphasised the benefits of the Cara SP's increased focus on this, with the roundtable in July 2022 and a further one planned later in the year. They hoped new plans of support would come from them, particularly focused on moving towards ways the institutions' qualifications can be recognised outside of NW Syria.
    - All those pursuing academic careers with an intention to undertake research valued the opportunities to do so in their own subject area, with some who focus on natural science subjects worried this might end because there was more limited funding available for research outside of arts and humanities in 2022-23.
    - Those hoping to move out of Turkey and take up academic opportunities in other countries valued the EAP, which increased their options of countries in which it might be possible to seek work and the publications for the credibility it gives their CV.

69. *Revised views of relevance* - A number of participants noted the value of earlier activities that they had previously been at best, less enthusiastic about and at times, highly critical of. Examples included:
    - Participants who previously critiqued the group research on HE in Syria using social science methods, which many natural science-focused Syrian academics disliked and saw as irrelevant. Now participants noted the usefulness of learning about inter-disciplinary ways of working and the relevance of some of the skills developed in these activities such as survey development and data analysis for their own research.
    - a participant who critiqued their research incubation visits that had not seemed to be too successful in their immediate aftermath, had later proved fruitful, e.g., in stimulating new research topics.
    - Syrian academics reflected on earlier experiences such as challenging ethical approval processes (which had sometimes resulted in their lack of success in gaining research grants) but later providing useful experience.

These examples highlight the importance of continuing to track results and not to judge success or failure too early.

5. Efficiency and value for money

5.1 Cost analysis and value for money

Key finding: Cara SP represents excellent value for money in terms of the cost per participant and opportunities provided to them. The additional resources leveraged, particularly in terms of the time of highly qualified professionals and the networks they draw on provided for free to the Cara SP make a significant contribution to the cost-efficiency of the programme, as does the Cara SP team's careful stewardship of available monies.

Cost analysis

70. The evaluation undertook analysis of Cara SP's use of resources by considering how resources are used, how they are managed and the costs in relation to results. In this evaluation period of 2020-22 Cara SP raised funds through grants of nearly UK£1.7million. Analysis of budgets found three main categories of expenditure:
    a) Cara own's costs (salaries and related expenses plus a contribution to Cara running costs) which make up 44% of the programme budget;
    b) Direct costs of academic skills development and provision of professional experiences through workshops, research incubation visits, undertaking research and its dissemination, which also make up 44% of the programme budget;
    c) costs associated with English for academic purposes which make up 12% of the programme budget. It is likely that actual expenditure on EAP during 2020-22 was a smaller proportion of this given that in this time-period activities were almost entirely online due to COVID-19 restrictions.

71. The Cara SP team work hard to maximise the use of resources, e.g., in costs of hotels for workshops, the use of Gaziantep now for workshops, which was anticipated to be cheaper than Istanbul, seeking good value flights and other steps.

72. It should be noted that these amounts do not necessarily equal the actual cost of putting on the range of activities that Cara SP covers, but rather the cost to Cara (and its donors). Many of the actual costs are covered by supporters as described below.
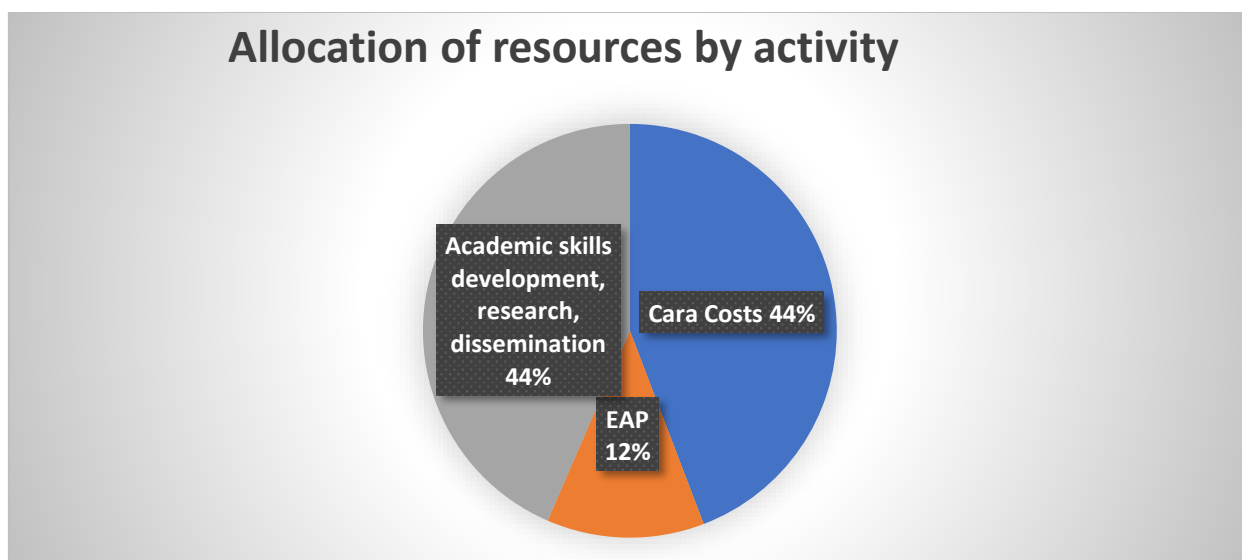

Figure 1 Allocation of funds by activity

Resources leveraged

73. Possibly the most significant measure which enables the programme to offer such excellent value for money are the resources the Cara SP team leverage from supporters through facilitating their donation of services without charge. This comes to an extraordinary total estimated annual contribution of over UK£1.7 million per year making over UK£4.25m over evaluation time period. This significantly exceeds the grant income of UK£1.7 million in total over the 30 month time period from January 2020 by some significant factor of over 2.5. A breakdown of time contributions is below. Furthermore, there is also a range of additional waivers that are secured each year e.g., fees waived by universities and free access to online resources. If paid for directly, the cost of the programme would increase by some 300% or more so Cara SP's leveraging of these resources, enabled by the significant donor grants, in effect increases the value of each donor's financial contributions by more than 300%.

Item- services and goods contributed without charge each year	Amount (UK£/year)
90 EAP volunteers weekly 1-2-1 2hours@£60/hour = £120x90x52	561,600
8 weekly Group Speaking practice sessions	33,000
70 Mentors/round x2/annum 120 hours @£60 /hour	1,008,000
Fee waivers (Pre-sessional/Gen English c)	15,000
Waived publication fees	24,000
RIV contribution (fellowship)	7,500
Course FEE waivers (latest £22,600 MSc plus £13,000 MA)	35,600
Independent expert reviewers 70x2hours@£60/hour	8,400
Licence Waivers – ScienceDirect, CUP Cambridge Empower	5,000
Uni of Edinburgh 4-week online course (19 Sham students)	20,000
Weekly Soiree Session Presenters	5,200
Total (12 months)	**1,723,000**

Figure 2 Funds leveraged per year - estimated, UK£, Source: Cara SP team

74. The voluntary contribution of so many professional hours of senior academics together with the successful negotiation of various fees being waived by universities makes a huge contribution to the programme and the value for money it provides to various donors. Taken together with the small team that runs the programme and its flexibility and responsiveness to individual priorities and evolving context makes the programme one that provides exceptional value for money.

Cost by results

75. Cost-effectiveness is difficult to calculate for the programme given the qualitative nature of the effects and impacts of the programme. Instead, the evaluation considered cost per participant. It found that in the evaluation period 2020-22 this came to nearly UK£7,500 per participant. Given the cumulative nature of the benefits of the programme and that some participants have been part of it from its beginning, a cost per beneficiary since its inception in 2016 was calculated. This found the costs per participant to be just over UK£14,000 over the six-year time period. It should be noted these costs do not consider in-kind contributions (see below). Also, this is an approximation of cost per participant based on the data available at the time of the evaluation (there have been some updates that may reduce the cost per

participant further from this already good value for money result).[17] This figure represents
excellent value for money for such an intensive programme with a wide range of
opportunities provided to participants.

Year	Expenditure UK£
2016	73,000.00
2017	198,062.80
2018	377,604.00
2019	683,385.66
2020	599,399.53
2021	557,069.45
2022	255,179.35
Total	2,743,700.79
Cost per participant 2020-22 (n=189)	7,469.04
Cost per participant 2016-22 (n=189)	14,516.94

Figure 3 Cost per participant

5.2 Management

Key finding: Cara SP successfully and nimbly negotiated the difficult time during the height of the COVID 19 pandemic displaying good and flexible programme management skills. Significant improvements are noted since the previous evaluation in data collection to track progress and communication of the programme to various audiences. Areas for development include transparency of decision-making, further communication products and processes to help the wider Cara team and SP supporters to understand and tell the story of the Cara SP, and use of internal communication processes that facilitate SP team working.

COVID-19 context

76. A challenge in the evaluation time period has been the occurrence of COVID-19 and the disruption it caused to plans and ways of working in the programme. Impressively, the programme has run relatively smoothly throughout this time with adaptations taking place quickly and the key activities continuing, including approaches to academic skills development, EAP and research practice. New people continued to join the programme and the research and other activity streams continued. In fact, the context in some instances catalysed or accelerated innovations the programme, e.g. the establishment of more informal online activities, the provision of training on remote academic practices, both teaching and research and more structured online research proposal support processes. Furthermore, there were some indirect benefits such as learning in the programme around the optimal way to combine online and in-person processes in skills development.

77. Factors that enabled the excellent adaptation to the COVID-19 context include the flexibility of the Cara SP team and wider network. It was aided by the previous years' work, relationships built within the teams, with the UK network and the Syrian participants. The

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[17] Cara reports some updates on the data regarding participant number which would actually decrease the cost per participant.

use of online approaches for part of the programme already, e.g. EAP and e-soirees was also a benefit. However, the experience also highlighted the shortcomings of working online entirely with some of the customisation, nuanced learning and benefits of face-to-face opportunities for collaboration being lost, as well as the challenges women faced in particular described earlier. Furthermore, Cara SP team lost the chance for direct, face-to-face interaction and in particular, to get to know new participants.

Data management and online resources

78. The Cara SP team's online resources and data management has developed further with a much-improved portal for resources for participants, a database for tracking participants and partners involvement in the programme, and progress in the development of a new website for the programme. There has also been some increase in social media activity through Linked-in, Twitter and Facebook

Team working

79. The programme team has grown to be made up of four staff and two consultants (one of these part-time). There are also inputs from the wider Cara team, e.g., from accounts and senior management. A wide network of supporters has been developed that forms part of a virtual team for the programme, some of this formalised in steering groups and some more informal.

80. It is noticeable, and to the programme team's credit, that many of the wider network of supporters and partners have remained with the programme and contributed to its evolution from the start. Many more have joined in a small role, e.g., as a mentor and grown to be a more active participant in the programme development.

81. Some notable developments that have helped the wider SP network, include the expanded documented briefing for mentors detailing their role and answers to common questions. A newsletter updating EAP tutors on wider programme developments has also been well received.

82. A common theme in the virtual team's recommendation for improvement is the need for more clarity earlier in the year on activities to enable them to safeguard their time and participation. While this is challenging given the funding environment and more recent COVID-19 environment, it is not impossible. Increasing awareness of the plan for the year highlighting key activities, timing of activities and when inputs will be needed would be beneficial (participants and supporters understand this may change but it gives them something to work around, although the Cara SP team reported that changing dates can lead to confusion).

Internal

83. COVID-19 forced everyone to work remotely. The Cara SP team returned to working in the office part-time earlier in 2022. This has enabled greater contact with each other and other parts of the organisation. However, there remain relatively few occasions when the team meet face-to-face all together. Weekly meetings in-person would be beneficial for all to contribute to planning and build a shared understanding of the programme's development.

It would also provide more opportunities for integrated planning between the different strands.

84. Communication methods for teamwork have evolved significantly during COVID-19 with an acceleration in most organisations' adoption of online platforms such as MS teams or google-based systems for communication and joint-working.

85. These methods enable a growing team, including one with turnover, to keep track of developments and are usually more efficient for the team as a whole. It is noticeable that the Cara SP team does not use these methods beyond zoom for some meetings (the evaluation did not explore what other parts of Cara use). Some team members highlighted the challenge to keep abreast of programme developments and would like to trial working through these platforms more.

86. An issue highlighted in the past evaluation and being looked at in a separate process is the links with other parts of Cara .[18] As noted, the move to more of the Cara SP team being based in the office increases the potential connections at the programmatic level and also the personal relations between the Cara members of staff. However, some of the language often used in the Cara SP team exacerbates its sense of separateness. This includes reference to "Cara central" to refer to the office and team who are not Cara SP, which is picked up and used by some of the wider network of Cara supporters, embeds a sense of the Cara Syria Programme as marginal or separate somehow from Cara. At the same time the fact that the Cara SP, like other previous country programmes is funded through and dependent on grants raised largely by the programme team rather than any core support maybe also adds to this.

Transparency and decision making

87. The previous evaluation recommended greater transparency in decision-making e.g., in relation to how individuals are selected for certain opportunities and criteria for these. This need has continued and indeed expanded now that there is an additional focus through the pilot project in NW Syria where the politics are obviously complex involving participants working at Sham University. Choices about the focus of Cara SP's attention whether it is at the individual, institutional, or thematic level, are important to be documented and transparent, to enable organisational decision-making, risk management at the senior management and governance levels. These are discussed in some meetings but some interviewees highlighted they would welcome more focused discussions on some of these specific issues.

Communication - externally

88. The Cara SP team have evolved the programme's communication in past years, e.g., through use of social media and indirectly, through greater promotion of the research that Cara SP supported, e.g., through the symposium and briefing papers. Three areas emerged where more focus on communication could be beneficial.

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[18] A strategy of better alignment between programmes was approved by the Cara Council in 2021 and a way forward documented in a paper entitled "Towards greater synergy" and subsequent work.

a) Evaluation interviewees reported that university staff are confused about Cara's different programmes that may involve the same university. This can have practical implications when they are trying to access resources for the programme.

b) A number of interviewees, internal and external to Cara expressed their difficulties to convey succinctly the entirety of the Syria Programme to external audiences. They often felt they did not have the full overview of the programme. The creation of some communication tools, resources and succinct updates could help all those involved to support the communication of the programme and its successes. The forthcoming website for the Cara SP will help with this.

c) Cara SP social media activity has increased, but there is much scope for a more active social media presence. The wide network of Cara SP supporters provides a valuable resource to do this. Much of the social media content from Cara SP is quite factual and formal, which contrasts to the informal tone usually used in much of social media. This derives to some extent from a commitment to protect the security of the Syrian programme participants and reputation of the organisation. But active guidance to the networks of supporters on how to promote information about the Cara SP and safety of individuals can address any internal reservations about more social media coverage of the programme. There is potential for more social media content e.g., more informal, accurate content to promote awareness of the programme, its successes including those of individual participants stories and research products and academic partnerships.

Tracking progress

89. While Cara SP overall data management has improved, there remains additional data that could be useful to track for value for money analysis. These include the following:

- Tracking and regularly reporting expenditure by key activity areas against budgeted/planned expenditure (at the programme level rather than only the project grant level)

- Tracking and regularly reporting numbers of participants <u>newly</u> brought into research opportunities through competitive grants particularly those in their chosen field.

- Tracking and regularly reporting number of outputs and other benefits or results <u>per research project or research grants,</u> e.g., conference papers, presentations, journal articles and other outputs. Current data is compiled into a lengthy list which is impressive but difficult to link back to specific research grants.

6. Impact

6.1 Impact at the individual level

Key finding: Cara SP has contributed to its participants' sense of well-being and importantly to their livelihood opportunities. Further study could identify more clearly the scale of this impact and extent of the programme's contribution.

General

90. Past evaluations identified some of the intangible benefits identified by participants which were repeated in evaluation interviews this time and are still relevant. Participants emphasised the contribution their participation in the programme makes to their sense of well-being particularly through the connections it provides to global academia. This impact

has been increased as the programme enabled more opportunities in their chosen subject areas.

Impact at the level of individuals' career and livelihood options

91. The current priority emphasised by Syrian participants was their livelihood and financial security. As discussed earlier, the programme focuses on relevant activities, skills and products e.g., publications that are useful to progress academic career options in and outside of Turkey and/or Syria. Some impacts on participants' academic career options are emerging as follows.

92. *Employment in Turkish Universities* - In universities in Turkey the Syrian participants noted the discrimination and pressure they experience. They are allocated heavy teaching loads and their positions are vulnerable. However, interviewees noted that the Cara SP had bolstered their ability to apply for and retain jobs. They noted that the EAP skills they have gained through Cara SP and the publications they have co-written as part of Cara SP research grants are helping them secure and retain employment. Their international connections, developed through the Cara SP gives them credibility in the universities. Inter-disciplinary research undertaken as part of the Cara SP has broadened their experience of a wider range of subjects and made them more flexible employees able to undertake a broader range of teaching roles, so helping with employment security too.

93. It is hard to quantify the extent of the contribution of the programme to an individual's employment success – consultation with employers would be an important addition to the process to explore this further. But from Syrian participant perspectives, they are confident that their publication track record, international connections and academic skills, all enhanced through the programme, have contributed significantly to their CVs, confidence and the value they bring to an academic role.

94. *Other employment opportunities* - The Cara SP facilitated access for programme participants to paid academic opportunities beyond the programme. Some of these have been directly brokered by the programme and some have evolved independently. Examples include:
    - Involvement in the award-winning Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS) knowledge-transfer project to farmers in NW Syria podcasts for farmers in NW Syria led by the University of Sussex (3-4 participants)
    - Open University consultancy to develop an OU online 'Arabic Language and Culture' course.
    - Consultancies for UK NGO Re-alliance and later Malteser Foundation to support regenerative approaches in Syria (vegetable gardens) (2 participants)
    - Consultancy on USAID funded 'Education Can't Wait' evaluation in relation to the Syria component.

6.2 Impact on humanitarian and development policy and practice/wider academia

Key finding: Cara SP research is contributing to academic, humanitarian and development knowledge bases including in, but not limited to, the area of Higher Education.

95. Academic teams supported by Cara SP have produced high quality research as evidenced by its publication in respected peer-reviewed journals. The research has academic value and also has policy and practice relevance. Like all research projects, it is unlikely that a single project, particularly at the scale of Cara SP grants, will often lead directly to recommendations being actioned for application in policy or practice, but rather they contribute to a broader body of work in specific areas that can then be applied.

96. However, there are examples of Cara SP research having direct impact. Examples shared by participants to the evaluation include:
    a) *Development of measures in universities in NW Syria* **to address barriers and support female participation in Syrian HE -** Sham University in NW Syria set up female spaces, dormitories and other facilities in line with recommendations made in the Cara SP (strand 4) research on gender inequalities in HE and as recommended by the research team in meetings with the university management.
    b) *Development of* **storage facilities to protect seeds** *which evolved through generations of adaptation to Syrian conditions -* Storage facilities were developed following Cara SP-supported research and technical cooperation with the UK Millennium Seed Bank. The methods used at that point fitted the harsh conditions of the context when there was no reliable electricity. The research team members reported that another future development could be in new storage facilities that are now feasible in current conditions in NW Syria, meaning the initiative may continue (not necessarily with Cara SP support).
    c) *Work on* **strengthening value chains and food security** *supported by Cara SP has been integrated into proposals* developed by SP participants in their work with NGOs which went onto successfully secure UN funding to implement.
    d) *Syria programme participants are involved in work* **to increase Syrian farmer access to latest research and to promote farmer extension services**. The Cara SP facilitated links between programme participants and academics at Sussex University on a project to promote agricultural knowledge transfer and links in Syria, a project that itself grew from the UK-based academic's experience as a mentor on Cara SP research relating to value chains. The new project, Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS) involves Cara SP participants as consultants in different activities including promoting awareness of sustainable farming methods, identifying information needs of the farmers and creating podcasts and videos to meet these. The success of the project was acknowledged in awards it has received for impact and inter-disciplinary research.[19]

6.3 Impact on Syrian Higher Education

> **Key finding: The Cara SP has strengthened the skills and connections of Syrian academics involved the development of HE in NW Syria and plausibly contributes to the quality of the HE being delivered in NW Syria.**

97. The programme strengthened a cadre of Syrian academics with enhanced academic skills in research, teaching, and wider academic skills e.g., proposal development, curriculum development and others, some of whom are already involved in teaching and developing Syrian academic institutions in the NW. It is reasonable to assume this is having a positive impact on the quality of their teaching in HE institutions including in NW Syria.

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[19] https://agricultural-voices.sussex.ac.uk/

98. The programme has created connections between Syrian and other international academics that are relevant not only for the individual Syrian academic, but also their institutions, including Syrian universities in NW Syria, and their students and colleagues. Some of these already are evolving independently of Cara and there is potential for more to do so over time.

99. *Cara SP-produced research on areas key to the quality of HE in NW Syria.* This is a valuable resource in itself on which initiatives to build HE quality can be based. The research also documented the experience of HE in NW Syria that could otherwise be forgotten. The documentation **provides a valuable resource to both future policy and interventions** to support the development of Syrian HE, but also to the wider community working on HE in conflict-affected contexts, which seeks to understand the impacts of conflict on HE and how they can be addressed.

100. However, the impact of this research beyond its documentation is unclear, i.e., its use or the extent of awareness of its findings in international policy or funding organisations with actual or potential interest to support HE in NW Syria. There is no articulated aim for Cara SP in relation to this area. It is worth noting that the analysis of the Syrian HE situation has value beyond Syria, potentially to other conflict-affected areas.

101. It is worth highlighting that other conflict-affected areas that have already grappled with some of the HE issues now facing academics in NW Syria may have relevant experience to learn from. Initial links were made with other conflict-affected areas including the Balkans, Palestine, and Northern Ireland in an SP round table in 2019. UK academics involved in the SP highlighted that these contacts could be relevant to revisit for institutions in NW Syria, as they have direct experience in addressing the challenges to quality of HE in conflict-affected areas.

6.4 Capturing and communicating impact

102. As the sections above demonstrate, there are real impacts emerging now to which the programme has contributed at the individual level (e.g. career development), at the level of humanitarian policy and practice through research supported by Cara SP being communicated and acted on, and at the level of HE in NW Syria through work which considers the quality of HE and the individuals involved in its development. While the programme has improved its data collection for monitoring and reporting purposes, more there's potential to increase the focus on capturing these changes in monitoring.

103. Furthermore, more external communication of these results would be relevant now. External communication could include accessible success stories such as a) those of individual Syrian academics at risk and displaced who are building successful careers in academia despite the many obstacles b) the academics building Syrian HE in NW Syria afresh and c) the international bonds and cooperation. These have all been nurtured by the Cara SP and told more compellingly to promote awareness of the successes of the Cara SP. The forthcoming new SP-dedicated website provides a platform for that along with the increasing focus on communication in general.

7. Creating impact

7.1 SWOT analysis

104. In line with the terms of reference, the evaluation produced a SWOT analysis to articulate some of the identified key internal strengths and weaknesses along with external opportunities and threats facing the programme.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• **Responsiveness** of the programme to individual participant priorities. Responsiveness to emerging group/collective priorities e.g. teaching skills and opportunities e.g. evolving HE in NW Syria. • **Flexibility** to adapt to changed contexts e.g. COVID-19 context. • **Value for money** particularly through use of volunteer time and other resources leveraged, as well as careful stewardship of resources. • **Network** of supporters and partners developed and sustained • **Quality of research** being produced, including unique analysis of NW Syrian HE and other research focused on the Syrian context and experience. • **Continuity -** Sustained academic relationships and partnerships established including in EAP. Continuity – the benefits of participants' continuous participation and the complementarity of different activity strands is evident. The sustained continuity of partners and supporters is exceptional. • **Expanded role facilitating partnerships -** Flexibility of Cara SP to evolve and include a role in which it facilitates partnerships through practical, advisory and other brokering and support services.	• **Unclear end point** for an individual's participation reflecting a tension between capacity development opportunities for many v more depth for those who progress furthest. • **Limited systematic follow up** of some results, outcomes and impacts including research dissemination, uptake and use. • **Confusion among partners** including universities about different Cara programmes. This is not necessarily the Cara SP focal points but other individuals and departments e.g. senior management that play a role in facilitating university cooperation and support to different activities of Cara. • **Limitations on communication of success** - Limitations in Cara staff and governance confidence including in the SP team to tell the story of the Cara SP. • **Internal constraints felt by team** -challenges to track programme developments as a team. • **Transparency** - The nuanced contextual knowledge held by the Cara SP team is not documented limiting the transparency of decision-making and risk management. • **Outcome tracking** - Lack of shared consensus across Cara on what constitutes an outcome and agreement on the indicators to track progress towards these, e.g., key performance indicators. • **Rapid analysis of financial data** for value for money analysis e.g. cost per outputs and working towards cost per outcome. • **Exit strategy** -No exit strategy for either participants or Cara as a whole. • **Capacity (Cara SP team size) which slows the pace of implementation** of many strategic activities e.g., development of toolbox which can support Cara emergency response work

Opportunities	Threats
• **Use the Cara SP network to expand social media presence** building on the large networks of academics and others involved in the UK, Syria, Turkey and internationally • **Exploit online opportunities** - Support participants to promote their research online and engage in remote academic platforms. • **Meet specific career needs** - Meet needs relevant to academic careers in Turkey e.g. support for English language tests used. • **Build on the experience of cooperation with the OU** to explore opportunities with others specialised in remote working/online education, which may be relevant for Syrian academics who cannot travel e.g., Open University sister institutions across Europe • **Expand the Cara role as a facilitator of support to NW Syrian** HE building, drawing on the analysis of the context, needs and potential ways forward that the Cara SP supported research has produced. • **Use the Cara SP experience to develop work in other conflict-affected contexts** such as Ukraine which will a) further demonstrate relevance of the approach and b) learn lessons of the applicability of the approach elsewhere.	• **Lack of funding for NW Syria HE** continues and worsens • **Funding ends without exit strategy** planned or implemented • **Political context** in Turkey and/or Syria further threatens Syrian refugee security, ability to remain in Turkey and the programme's ability to be implemented in its current format. • **Reputation and other risks** for Cara increase or are realised by its widening role in HE inside NW Syria.

8. Lessons from the Cara SP for other conflict-affected contexts

105. The evaluation considered which aspects of the Cara SP might be relevant to other conflict-affected areas and potential Cara programmes there. Some work has begun to document the lessons and approaches from the Cara SP that should be captured and built on. This section seeks to contribute the lessons evolving from the evaluation that may help inform the structure and content of guidance, toolkits and resources to be created (and underway to some extent) to build the Cara country programme model or approach to country and regional programmes.

106. Evaluation interviewees were keen to emphasise the uniqueness of each individual conflict and how war impacts on it. Differences mean the Cara SP cannot be considered a blueprint to replicate but rather it provides a menu of options from which a new programme can be designed. Key variables are the:

a) *Characteristics of HE* in the country of conflict, e.g., quality, approach, language, which will influence the needs of conflict-affected academics for support particularly from the UK to be able to work internationally.

b) *Nature of the conflict including how it impacts on HE,* e.g., whether academics become targets, how infrastructure damage will influence the number of academics leaving and potential longer-term aims that a Cara country or regional programme might have.

c) *Pattern and dynamics of population movement* from the conflict and whether refugees settle in one or a few countries or are dispersed into numerous locations. The Cara SP has been able to focus its support on academics in Turkey. This geographic base has helped Cara management and the programme team to understand the political dynamics within academia, to build the trust and understanding of the participants, as well as for the participants to understand and trust Cara. In other conflicts academics may not be so concentrated in one country.

107. The Cara SP programme has produced resources relevant to other contexts. These include:

a) *Products* such as the online academic foundation course, EAP materials and discipline resources, workshop structure/curriculum, e-soiree programme and others.

b) *People and networks* in the form of a growing number of academics and others e.g. EAP teachers with interest and/or experience and some understanding of working with conflict-affected academics. It is reasonable to assume that for many their interest is not limited only to the Syrian conflict but other academics at risk.

c) *Processes* that have been followed and developed in the creation and development of the programme (see below).

108. Relevant processes are:

a) *The initial feasibility assessment and design process* – consultations with Syrian academics, location of them, consultation with Turkish and UK academics, reaching out to relevant networks, factors considered, sources of knowledge, other.

b) *The EAP approach* - which includes one-to-one online pairings, in-person workshops, online speaking practice groups, informal social and presentation opportunities, close linkage with academic skills development.

c) *Academic skills development* through creation of semi-formal learning processes in workshops (online and in-person) with in-practice approaches through team research projects and a competitive grants system.

d) *Facilitating and supporting relevant research production* built on international collaboration.

e) *Collaboration and network facilitation* for research projects and also other collaboration, e.g., workshops, soirees, research including how to maximise the benefits of combining remote and in-person inputs, identifying mentors, rationale for group-research approaches, Cara brokering role, means of leveraging additional assistance, university processes to facilitate opportunities, e.g., USW/Cara Fellow Scheme.

f) *Awareness raising/visibility* – processes to promote awareness of the Syrian participants and the research produced, e.g., symposium, roundtables, media/social media engagement, support for presentation at conferences, other.

g) *programme management* including:
- *How to keep abreast of relevant political developments* in a conflict-affected area and their implications for a Cara programme.
- *Maintaining communication with the conflict-affected academics* and supporters to sustain involvement,
- *Fundraising* and ways to package a programme to appeal to different types of donors, as well as potential useful networks and other resources;
- *Enabling programme management and continuity* in the face of an unpredictable, conflict-affected context and also funding cycles.
- *Key lessons* from the programme including how to manage communication about Cara programmes within UK universities and beyond, as well as other links with other activities for maximum efficiency, effectiveness and impact.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

109. The Cara Syria Programme is contributing to significant impacts for individual Syrian participants and results are emerging for policy and practice and for HE in NW Syria. The Cara Syria Programme has maintained its relevance in an evolving context.

110. Factors that have enabled the programme's success include its adaptability to new opportunities and challenges, and the team's responsiveness to individuals' priorities, shaping assistance where possible to enable their efforts to progress. The programme team's innovative approach and willingness to adapt planned activities to new conditions such as those imposed by COVID-19 has been crucial.

111. A key factor contributing to the sustained success is the strong network of individuals committed to the aims of the programme, who play an active role in its evolution. They helped to develop meaningful opportunities for participants including by developing various academic development opportunities within their own UK universities, in research initiatives with third party funding, as well as through the provision and development of EAP and other activities. Furthermore, the contribution of this scale of services and time without charge represents a major donation, which increases the value of all actual financial donations more than three-fold. It also contributes to the sustainability of aspects of the programme and its results.

112. The Syrian conflict is at a point where Syrian academics are making longer-term decisions about their future and where their academic and their family's future, in particular, lie – in Turkey, in Syria or beyond. The programme's activities are relevant to each of these options, though there is scope for more explicit focus on the priorities for these different paths i.e., for those who are choosing to remain in Turkey, for those who want to take up an international career and for those who aim to focus on rebuilding HE in NW Syria.

113. A significant development in the past three years has been the programme's increased support to Cara SP participants active in institutions in NW Syrian HE. This work is being approached gradually and carefully. However, Cara's intended outcomes, more immediate aims and the strategy that Cara intends to pursue in relation to HE in NW Syria is currently not clear to all. There is strong support from Syrian academics to support this area of work, including from participants not actively involved in HE in NW Syria themselves (so not out of

self-interest). But there are also a number of options for Cara at the management and governance level to consider in support of the Cara SP team, in terms of its role and potential risks that need to be managed. Clearer documentation and explicit time for discussion on these, e.g., i. Finance and General Purposes Committee (F&GPC) and SP Steering Committee will help to keep the management and governance understanding of the options and evolving direction.

114. Factors that inhibit the extent of the programme's success include external factors such as funding limits, travel restrictions on Syrians and individual participants' circumstances, which influence choices available to them. A crucial factor is that the financial future of the programme beyond 2023 is very uncertain, which is a challenge to planning and future strategy.

115. The framework for the programme has stood now for six years. It is timely to recalibrate its framework and how aims and intended results are articulated and tracked. These will provide opportunities to establish new systems to enable tracking of results and impact e.g. to identify a limited set of intended outcomes with associated key performance indicators such as number of outputs per research team,anticipated, changes in participants skills, other anticipated impacts at individual, policy or other levels. Other opportunities and challenges to address include the equipping of the wide range of partners and stakeholders internally and externally with tools and content to be able to articulate succinctly the programme's approaches and progress.

116. More detailed recommendations are below. However, as always, most recommendations will have resource implications so require a discussion within the Cara SP team and at management and governance level, on if and how to accept and respond to these. A management response to this evaluation with note of acceptance or rejection of the recommendation plus agreed actions is a good starting point.

Recommendations

1. **Funding decision: Make an explicit decision regarding the future of the programme beyond current funding in 2023.** Needed strategies that follow from this decision then will be either a) a fundraising strategy and its active implementation to establish a future financial base or b) exit strategies for Cara's support to individuals on the programme and the area of work more generally. These could be useful even if funding and programme activity continues into 2024 and beyond. The following recommendations assume a continuation of the programme.

2. **Programme framework: Recalibrate the programme framework by revising the programme's aims and intended outcomes for the next three years to capture the intended results to be achieved through the combined activities.** These would go beyond targets for individual activity area but rather capture the intended changes the programme seeks to achieve in skills, behaviours, knowledge, and other within a defined timeframe at the individual, policy and practice levels, including in relation to international policy relevant to NW Syrian HE development.

3. **Approach to HE in NW Syria: Refine and agree at governance level Cara SP's approach and plan to support HE in NW Syria over the next three years**
    a) This should articulate the long-term goal to which Cara SP will contribute, the more immediate milestones or results that Cara SP can achieve and the range of activities that will be undertaken. This might include gathering evidence and learning from pilots at this point with planned reflection points for decisions on the next stage.
    b) An important part of the plan will be an explicit articulation of the range of risks and how these can be mitigated. A key challenge is how to maintain a shared understanding of the dynamics of the context to enable good governance and management of the programme. This process will need active involvement from the key stakeholders in Cara to finalise, i.e., the Cara SP team, Cara management and members of the relevant governance structures.
    c) As part of the approach, establish a system to track progress towards the aims along with associated data collection and management.

4. **Outcomes and impact: Focus monitoring on outcomes and impact by increasing the resources allocated to track programme progress focused at <u>outcome and impact levels.</u>**

    a) Develop a set of <u>up to eight key performance indicators (KPI)</u> that the programme will report on to the Cara management, SP Steering Committee and other relevant governance structure (F&GPC) every 3-6 months
    b) *Institutionalise <u>annual</u> self-reporting* by all participants to produce a short reflection piece and/or survey to collect perspectives on the results and benefits for them that participation in the programme has achieved, to share their own ambitions and recommendations for the programme. Review, collate, analyse and use these reflections to inform future stages of the programme and to support individuals in their aims.
    b) *Develop case studies of success (*longitudinal studies) of selected participants and research teams to demonstrate the Cara SP results and the combination of activities that have contributed to them.
    c) Provide *analysis* of programme monitoring data for discussion at programme management and governance levels including:
    *   Costs per activity or output area (with combined donor contributions over the time period)
    *   Numbers of participants *newly* brought into research opportunities through competitive grants, particularly those in their chosen field (these maybe existing participants who, for the first time succeed in a grant application or new individuals).
    *   Proportion of new team leaders in the research teams and proportion of these who are women.
    *   outputs and other benefits or results *per research project/grant*, e.g., conference papers, presentations, journal articles and other outputs (rather than a standalone list of outputs)

5**. Communication of success: Enhance communication of the programme.**

    a) Build on current work with the network of Cara SP supporters to increase social media coverage of the programme e.g. , through production of more informal social

media content and creation of resources to support staff, governance and supporters to be able to tell the story of the programme and its successes succinctly. Develop guidance for Cara staff and its network of partners including participants on use of social media to promote awareness of the programme's activities and results

   b) Increase use of the full range of communication channels to convey some of the programme's success stories at the levels of the individual participant, research area and teams and partnerships.

   c) Capture some of the lessons that UK academics reported as benefits for them from engagement with Syrian academia, e.g., understanding alternative academic priorities and writing styles across culture.

6. **Communication of research: Increase the programme focus on the research teams communication of research.**

   a) *Ensure communication strategies* for part of a research proposal and continue the practice to review these once the initial research report is produced.[20]The documented strategies may include but not be limited to publications.

   b) *Encourage and track a broader range of outputs* beyond only publications when teams develop their communication strategies, e.g., to promote research produced in grey literature platforms which may achieve more profile more quickly.

   c) *Track the research team's implementation of their planned communication strategy* of research along with how it is received and/or used.

7. **Customisation for career pathways: Consider options for activities that benefit the different career options open to participants.**

   Increase the focus on activities which enhance Syrian academics' job security in Turkey for example more focus and awareness among EAP tutors about the EAP tests used by universities in Turkey and considering ways to link more Turkish academics and institutions into the programme. Develop processes to support programme participants use of social media in academic circles as a means to promote their profile and help secure livelihood opportunities.

8. **Transparency and equity: Sustain and increase measures which enhance equity and transparency in the programme.**

   a) Document the rationale for decisions regarding individuals and institutions selected for opportunities and support.

   b) Enhance the most socio-economic disadvantaged participants' opportunities in online chances through sustaining the provision of additional equipment when needed e.g. laptops.

   c) Build on the current experience to challenge any discriminatory behaviour within the programme with an explicit process for women and/or minorities to report any experience of discrimination within the programme including from colleagues and develop a process on how to address this.

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[20] Audiences for research can change from the anticipated research at proposal stage to when final findings have been established. Thus, the proposal for communication developed by research teams at the proposal stage is likely to benefit from being revisited and revised once the research is complete.

9. **Cara SP's role in facilitation of partnerships : Make Cara SP's facilitation and brokering role more systematic and explicit**
    a) Articulate the range of services that Cara can contribute to emerging partnerships and other initiatives that may be interested to work with programme participants
    b) Plan time for this as an explicit activity area.
    c) Continue work to build more links with relevant initiatives – e.g. explore the potential of partnerships with initiatives such as Universities of Sanctuary, Research Funding foundations with interest in conflict, migration and displacement issues, e.g., Leverhulme and other potential allies.

10. **Team communication and integration: Further enhance programme team effectiveness through use of additional communication platforms and/or channels**
    a) Introduce more frequent face-to-face, in-person meetings of the whole Cara SP team.
    b) Establish 3-monthly integrated planning opportunities to maximise links between activities.
    c) Use communication channels such as MS Teams for communication between meetings that make it easier for the whole team to track programme developments efficiently.

11. **Learning for future models : Accelerate the process to create resources for future Cara programmes in conflict-affected areas building on the experience of the Cara Syria and other country programmes.**

    a) People and networks - Explore the interest of current networks, supporters and partners in the Cara SP to be part of future programmes in other conflict areas. Establish database of contacts that is easily sortable by interest area and potential roles.
    b) **Create and promote use of resource banks** to pull together the materials used in skills development programmes including for EAP (particularly in subject specific resources, that other tutors may wish to use in one-to-one sessions with their partner participants in the Cara SP too) and academic skills development sessions in the future.
    c) **Accelerate the current process to document key lessons from the Cara SP for other Cara country/regional programmes.**

Syria Programme Independent Evaluation
Terms of Reference (TOR)

Period to Cover   January 2020 to July 2022.

Overall Syria Programme Aims To nurture and sustain Syrian academics and facilitate future opportunities by strengthening and connecting them and enabling their continued academic engagement [and contribution] as a group that is vital to the future of Syria. *This will be achieved by* supporting professional development and facilitating research collaborations amongst Syrian academics in exile and with colleagues from the wider international academic/scientific communities.

Research Outputs Rigorous quality research and outputs including publication of findings and recommendations in peer-reviewed journals and presentation at international conferences, are central to Cara's dissemination strategy.

Funding Core (Total £1,695,431.25)
- **OSF Phase 3.** £501,427.37 (*Apr.2019 to May 2020 Extended to Jun.2021*)
- **OSF Phase 4.** £304,333 (*Oct.2020 to Sep.2022*)
- **Mellon Phase 2.** £889,670.88 (*Oct.2019 to Sep.2021 Extended to Dec.2022*)

Funding Third Party (Total £181,207.91)
- **Reading Uni.** (Internal GCRF) Covid & Language £3,346 (2019-20)
- **Edinburgh Uni**. (AHRC) Syrian Food Futures **£93,564.53** *(Sep.2019-Aug.2021)*
- **Kent Uni.** (Brit. Ac. 'Ac. Writing Workshop Grant') **£19,260.00** *(Jan.-Dec.20 Extended to Mar.2022)*
- **WaterFOre** (UKI grant) **£10,300.30** *(Apr.-Oct.2020 Extended to Dec.2020)*
- **Edinburgh Uni.** (???) Slavery within the Turkish Agricultural sector. **£22,487.08** *(Oct.20-Apr.21)*
- **Sussex Uni.** (Internal GCRF) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Podcast Pilot) **£17,000** *(Dec.20-Jul.21)*
- **Sussex Uni.** (Impact Grant) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Podcast) **£4,500** *(Sep-Dec2021)*
- **Sussex Uni.** (Internal) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Video) **£7,750** *(Mar.-Jul.2022)*
- **Sussex Uni.** (Internal) Agricultural Voices Syria (AVS-Focus Group, Turkey) **£1,000** *(2 Jul.2022)*
- **Sussex Uni.** (Internal) **Value Chain £2,000** *(Mar.-Jul.22)*

Independent Evaluation Aim

To evaluate the effectiveness, including cost effectiveness, efficiency and impact of Syria Programme activities over the defined period, with a particular focus on key performance indicators, individual and research-related outcomes, research/teaching balance, and quality of research dissemination, with reference to the overall Syria Programme aims. Priority areas will be established during the inception phase in consultation with the Cara Middle East Adviser. Below some potential important areas to consider are identified.

- the impact of the pandemic on the programme and resulting changes;
- the continued relevance of the overall Syria Programme (SP) or individual SP activities in respect of the development of a Cara 'emergency response' model or tool kit[21] that can be

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[21] The term 'tool kit' refers to activities or parts of activities that are deemed to have been effective and potentially replicable in other comparable scenarios where academics as a group are targeted and forced into exile.

drawn on to support academics affected by future comparable crises; ***and reflect and comment on***

- the Syria Programme's brokering and facilitation role, not just in terms of connecting Syrian academics to each other and colleagues within higher education sectors (UK and host country), but also in terms of efforts to increase the visibility of, and accessibility to, Syrian academics in exile; to highlight the significance of their local knowledge, expertise and reach to networks inside Syria; and to facilitate discussion, engagement and collaboration with key responders to the Syria crisis;

- the importance of Cara's role as a 'legal umbrella' to facilitate the contracting of Syria Programme participants as research consultants by third parties, and of its 'partnering model'[22] in engendering a necessary level of credibility amongst Syria academics and confidence amongst key responders to the crisis that Syrian-led research will deliver enriched rigorous quality research outputs;

- the extent of its role as it engages at the institutional level with Sham University – e.g. supporting the development of a quality strategy and teaching capacity-building amongst Sham faculty.

- whether SP data collection is sufficient to provide a cost/benefit learning on the programme's development over its lifetime;

- the ongoing need for, and the continued relevance of, the Syria Programme, in its sixth year with a view to expanding its funder base and its brokering role to facilitate increasingly Syrian academic-led initiatives – e.g. Syrian Research Centre;

- the synergy agenda, i.e. Cara and the Cara Syria Programme/ and the benefits of its country programmes to its standing and visibility;

Questions to be explored that spring from the above:
- *Which qualities and resources (e.g. Cara Scholars at Risk UK Universities Network) particularly equip and enable Cara to occupy the space required to deliver this type of programme?*
- *Do primary and secondary stakeholders/partners have a shared understanding of the aims and intended outcomes of the SP?*
- *What constitutes success in the context of the Syria Programme's aims?*

Tasks
i.   Review documentation and data captured over the agreed period.
ii.   Review a selection of research outputs.
iii. Observe two 2-day SP events in Gaziantep: Round Table (23/24th July 2022) and Training workshop 'Developing Teacher Developers' (25/26th July 2022).
iv.   Review proposals and reports to the Programme's principal funders: Open Society Foundation and Mellon Foundation.
v.   Interview a selection of Syria Programme participants.
vi.   Interview a selection of SP supporters, e.g. mentors, EAP and ASD Steering Group members.
vii. Interview the Cara Chair, who also chairs the Syria Programme Steering and Selection committees.

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[22] The Cara 'partnering model' involves partnering less experienced academics/researchers – in this case Syrians – with experienced academic experts/researchers, usually from the UK, in the role of mentor or principal investigator (PI) to ensure delivery of rigorous quality research outputs.

viii. Interview the Cara Middle East Adviser.

ix. Review expenditure relative to the budget, to evaluate 'cost effectiveness'/'value for money'.

x. A SWOT analysis to highlight areas of weakness and challenges in addition to strengths.

Independent Evaluation Outputs Draft report (14th Oct. 2022) and Final report (4th Nov. 2022) and presentation to the Cara Council by the end of Dec. 2022, to include recommendations on an expanding role and areas for further development or consideration.

Timeframe This independent evaluation to take place between 11th July and 4th Nov. 2022.

Fee and Expenses £550/day up to a maximum of £7,700, to be paid in two tranches, 50% on signing of contract and the balance on delivery of the final evaluation outputs, plus agreed expenses to be paid on submission of original receipts.

Cara Support Cara to provide requested documents and full list of contacts to facilitate interviews.

Annex 2. Documents reviewed

Original Filename OR Doc name	Description
SP Volunteers (Mentors/PIs/EAP) who? what? have they working with the same study team over more than 1 grant?	Analysis
F&GPC SP Rprt Mar20	F&GPC Report
F&GPC SP Rprt May20	F&GPC Report
F&GPC SP Rprt June20	F&GPC Report
F&GPC SP Rprt Sep20	F&GPC Report
F&GPC SP Rprt May21	F&GPC Report
F&GPC SP Rprt Sep21	F&GPC Report
F&GPC SP Rprt Mar22	F&GPC Report
F&GPC SP Rprt May22	F&GPC Report
F&GPC Phase 4 Year 1 Report (Oct.2020 to Sep.2021)	F&GPC Report
Publication & Conf: Dissemination Master List	Dissemination List
Briefing Paper Series_Syrian Archaeology FNL_ENG_28Apr21	Briefing Papers
Briefing Paper_Impact of IDPs on Host Communities Albab_FNL ENG	Briefing Papers
Briefing Paper Series_Master Contact List	Briefing Papers
Symposium Programme	Symposium
Symposium Announcement/Invite	Symposium
Symposium Attendance	Symposium
Funding Proposal: OSF Ph3 Narrative (completed Dec 2021 with two extensions)	Funding Proposal
Funding Proposal: OSF Ph3 Budget (completed Dec 2021 with two extensions)	Funding Proposal
Funding Proposal: OSF Ph4 Narrative (completes Sep 2022)	Funding Proposal
Funding Proposal: OSF Ph4 Budget (completes Sep 2022)	Funding Proposal
Funding Proposal: Mellon 2-year Proposal Narrative (completes Dec 2022 with two extensions)	Funding Proposal
Funding Proposal: Mellon 2-year Proposal Budget/revised budget (completes Dec 2022 with two extensions)	Funding Proposal
Funder Rprt (Mellon) Phase 2 (Oct19-Sep20)	Mellon Report
Funder Rprt (Mellon) Yr1 Narrative Oct19-Sep20	Mellon Report
Funder Rprt (Mellon) Yr2 Expenditure & Proposed Reallocation	Mellon Report
Funder Rprt (Mellon) Yr2 Narrative Report Oct21-Dec22	Mellon Report
Funder Rprt (OSF) Narrative Report Oct20-Mar21 Phases3&4	OSF Report
Funder Rprt (OSF) Ph3 Full Period Including Extension	OSF Report
Funder Rprt (OSF) Ph4 Yr1 Budget-Expenditure	OSF Report
Funder Rprt (OSF) Ph4 Interim Rprt (Oct21-Mar22) Narrative	OSF Report
Funder Rprt (OSF) Ph4 Interim Rprt (Oct21-Mar22) Financial	OSF Report
Finance 2020 (end of year report)	Report to Cara
Finance 2021 (end of year report)	Report to Cara
Finance 2022 (Jan-July report)	Report to Cara
EAP-Related Research: Julia Hope EAP	Related research

EAP Stats - numbers involved in Strand 1 EAP overall and EAP activities and who they are	EAP
EAP APTIS progress	EAP
SP Participant profiles - disciplines/gender/employed or not/employed in uni or not	Analysis
Strand 2. ASD A&H Knowledge 12-week transfer course (x3 docs) Programme	Ad hoc
Strand 2. ASD Foundation Course compiled final reflections	Strand 2
Strand 2. ASD Soiree Topics by theme	Soirees List
Strand 2. ASD Soiree Session participation 2020	Analysis
Strand 2. ASD Soiree Session participation 2021	Analysis
Strand 2. ASD Soiree Session participation 2022	Analysis
Strand 2. Adhoc course - e.g. Future Learn (summary and dates)	Ad hoc
SP Events: Schedule/Summary F2F or online 2020 to 2022	Events
Round Table Feb 2020 (docs and publications from allied strand 4 Ph3 studies)	Round Table
Round Table Jul 2022 Programme	Round Table
Strand 5. Grants: numbers involved in pre submission, numbers involved in post submission workshops	Grant call
Strand 5. Grants: Recipients - how many grants have they been involved in either as Team lead or member	Grant call
Strand 5. Grant Apr22_MentorBrief+Q&A	Grant call
Strand 5. Grant Apr22Call_Ethics-DataMan&RiskAssessFrms_ENG	Grant call
Strand 5. Grant Apr22Call_GrantApplicationFrm&Gdnce_ENG	Grant call
Workshop Prog. *Educating Educator Developer* 25/26 July 2022 Programme	Training Workshop

Annex 3. Evaluation participants

Name	SURNAME	Institution	Category
Mirela	BARBU	Sussex Uni	
Adrian	BRENNAN	Durham Uni	
Cath	CAMPS	USW	ASD Steer Grp
Jake	Coulter	Cara SP team	Cara
Aysha	DIVAN	Leeds Uni	ASD Steer Grp/Mentor
Maggie	GRANT	Stirling	Mentor
Mirjam	HAUCK	Open Uni	External Beneficiary
Marion	HERON	Surrey	ASD Steer Grp/Mentor
Kristin	HOPPER	Durham	Mentor/RIV host
Michael	JENKINS	freelance	EAP Steer Grp
Ipek	MELIS	Cara SP	Cara
Juliet	MILLICAN	IDS	Consultant
Cagla	MERAL AKGUL	METU/Ankara	Co-PI/Mentor
Sophie	POVEY	Cara SP	Cara
Johan	SIEBERS	Middlesex	Mentor
Tom	PARKINSON	Kent	ASD Steer Grp/Mentor/RIV Host
Anais	RICHMOND	Cara SP	Cara
Kate	ROBERTSON	Cara SP	Consultant/Regional Programme Adviser
Angus	TAIT	Cara SP	Cara
Michael	WORTON	Cara Committee	Cara Chair, Chair SP Steering Committee/ Chair SP Grant Awarding Committee
Stephen	WORDSWORTH	Cara CEO	Cara
Agnes	WOOLLEY	Birkbeck	Mentor

18 Syrian academic participants (3 women, 15 men)

Names of the Syrian participants in the programme have been kept anonymous for security reasons.