

YAS ARAR MEMBERSHIP INITIATIVE

2016

YAS welcomes at-risk academic and refugee professionals into its membership.

Overview

The Royal Society of Edinburgh's (RSE) Young Academy of Scotland (YAS) has a total membership of 126 and recruits approximately 40 new members every two years. The introduction of the at-risk academic and refugee professional (ARAR) membership initiative coincided with the 2016 recruitment round. Its purpose was to enable YAS to support the reception and integration of ARAR professionals by: 1) recognising their potential to make outstanding and meaningful contributions to the future prosperity of Scotland; 2) providing access to the YAS network as full members; 3) helping them regain some of the social and professional capital that they lost during their displacement.

In August 2016, YAS became the first young academy in the world to welcome ARAR professionals into its ranks when it inducted Dr Ahmad Albtran (Syria), Dr Shawki Al Dubaee (Yemen), Dr Alaa Hamdon (Iraq) and Ms Debora Kayembe (Democratic Republic of Congo) at its annual general meeting. To ensure the sustainability of this initiative, YAS committed to reserving up to four additional spaces for ARAR professionals in each of the next two recruitment rounds (2018 and 2020).

In introducing this initiative, YAS is connecting with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and the central challenge of ensuring that no one is left behind. While it links with a number of the Goals, there is special recognition of Goal 16: 'to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'.

Review Remit

The RSE YAS SCIO trustees agreed that the ARAR membership initiative would be reviewed after its first year to assess the effectiveness of the new initiative, to get feedback from the new members on how it is working and to ensure that YAS has the necessary support systems in place to ensure its success.

Reviewers

The review was led by Dr S. Karly Kehoe, founder of the initiative, former YAS senior co-chair and co-lead of the International Links working group (IL WG), the group under whose remit the ARAR membership initiative now sits. She was joined by 3 IL WG members, the four ARAR members and two of the three YAS ARAR Buddies (YAS members who have volunteered to provide special, one-on-one support to the ARAR members). The review group is interdisciplinary and gender mixed.

Dr Ahmad Albtran (ARAR member; medicine)

Dr Shawki Al-Dubaee (ARAR member; computer science)

Dr Javier Escudero (IL WG; biomedical signal processing)

Dr Heather Ferguson (IL WG; global public health)

Dr Alaa Hamdon (ARAR member; geophysics)

Professor Giles Hammond (Buddy; YAS Alumni; physics)

Dr S. Karly Kehoe (former YAS senior co-chair; RSE YAS SCIO trustee; history)
Ms Debora Kyembe (ARAR member; law)
Professor Nasar Meer (YAS co-chair; co-developer of ARAR; sociology)
Dr Siobhan O'Connor (IL WG; nursing)
Dr Daniela Sime (Buddy; YAS member; education and social policy)

Documents

To enable the reviewers to get a sense of how the initiative began and developed, they received access to documentation via Basecamp, the online workspace for the ILWG. The documents included:

- Original SCIO Proposal for ARAR Initiative
- ARAR Application Form
- Interview Question List
- EU Integration Competition Application (used as a summary document)
- Letter to European young academies introducing initiative
- Letter to European senior academies introducing initiative

Main points

The review highlighted four main points: 1) interviews; 2) integration; 3) recruitment; 4) future funding.

Interviews

One of the first questions asked by the YAS reviewers was why all of the shortlisted ARAR candidates were invited for interview when no other YAS member is required to have or is given the opportunity for interview. The decision to hold interviews was taken before the initiative was launched for the following reasons:

- References were not required since candidates are displaced and getting them would be difficult or in some cases impossible. Professor Alison Phipps, RSE Fellow and UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts, advised, in the planning stages of the initiative, of the difficulty many refugees face when it comes to organising references. She suggested interviews as a good way of assessing the candidates.
- There was a need to ensure an adequate level of English competency.
- We were advised to expect shorter answers to the application questions than the regular-stream YAS applicants would provide and that interviews would help us to find out more information.
- It was thought that an interview would help to give the candidates a chance to meet a few YAS members, to see what the RSE looks like, and to feel more welcome by also providing a lunch.

Feedback on the interviews from YAS ARAR Cohort 1:

Ahmad Albtran (Syria): ‘Actually the interview was my first interview in Scotland and it helped me to be more confident. It was my first step to integrate with new society and to meet people from different countries. I am refugee from Syria, but now Scotland is my country. I hope that I can help people and communities in Scotland as they helped me.’

Alaa Hamdon (Iraq): ‘The interview was fine and very helpful for us to clarify the YAS framework, duties, rights and membership responsibility. Personally, I have enjoyed the interview and I have been informed about many issues [that] weren't within my considerations.’

Debora Kayembe (Democratic Republic of Congo): ‘I was happy to attend the interview because I think it benefits to all of us; the panel to get to know the candidates as well as for the candidates to meet the representatives of the Academy. My recommendation will be that in the future all new members should benefit for the interview.’

Integration

Integration is a central part of the initiative and the reviewers had a number of ideas about how YAS might further support the integration of the ARAR members:

- To ensure continued engagement, and to enable the ARAR members to feel able to contribute, the YAS Officer should make a special point of being in regular contact with them to flag various opportunities.
- It is not known to what extent the ARAR members feel comfortable claiming expenses for YAS-related activities and so every effort should be made to encourage them to do so. It is felt that this should be a responsibility of the YAS Officer.
- One, senior YAS member should take overall responsibility for the initiative. Currently, Kehoe does this, but the reviewers were mindful that she would become alumni in the summer of 2018.
- To find a way of enabling the ARAR members to share their experience with YAS members and people within the RSE Fellowship and throughout the wider RSE/YAS network of connections. A special TEDx series was suggested as a possibility. YAS members are needed to take this forward.
- Support Alaa Hamdon, who is now back in Iraq, with Book Bridge (to get books, when it is safe and when storage facilities exist, for Mosul University library). The main YAS contact for Book Bridge will be Stuart Reid, a new YAS co-chair.

Feedback on the integration from YAS ARAR Cohort 1:

Shawki Al-Dubae (Yemen): ‘Actually, your efforts are appreciated. You will rarely find someone to listen and understand you in responsibilities of the life. On YAS, I am feeling as an important member of a big family and YAS gave me a good opportunity to taste the academic life again and to be part of the academic community and to integrate easily with the Scottish society as well... Furthermore, I have learned various things from the first participation in Computing of Schools team. I participated in the Scottish Robotic Competition FLL [First Lego League] as the coach for the refugee children team and we have learned new skills and getting a fun and medals, too. It was an amazing, fabulous and interesting time to deal with the refugee children team and to be part of a big competition and my team is very excited to join the next year... Also, I think that the idea of Buddies is a great idea to transfer some experience, skills and to motivate the person to find his/her way easily.’

Feedback on the integration from YAS Buddies:

Daniela Sime (Member, University of Strathclyde): ‘I’ve met with Debora twice and kept in regular touch via email. We discussed the university system in the UK and opportunities for research funding and study. We are now both involved with a working group preparing a joint RSE-YAS document on Brexit and its implications for Scotland. Debora and I have agreed to meet in future to discuss joint research interests and further support we could offer at Strathclyde through the university for refugee graduates- we already have a scheme offering studentships to refugees and asylum seekers, but we would be interested in taking these plans further at Strathclyde. We would like to thank YAS for the scheme and given its benefits for both established YAS members and new members from the refugee community, we would be in favour of continuing the scheme in future.’

Giles Hammond (YAS Alumni, University of Glasgow): ‘For me this has been a useful opportunity to meet with someone outwith my normal field. We have met 2-3 times, and will meet again this week. This is not an onerous commitment and actually rather enjoyable, because you are trying to help out someone who is learning a new university system of funding, deadlines, research council opportunities; a real challenge even for a UK academic. I find that sometimes I can only point my buddy in the right direction, and he will then need to find out the information. I see that there are not so many opportunities out there for these YAS members, and this is a real shame, but at the same time I can try to keep him motivated and help out where I can.’

Recruitment

We were supported in our recruitment for the first round by the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) and the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC). Ensuring that at-risk academics know about this initiative is critical to ensuring the best-possible talent pool and so we plan to expand our reach for the next intake. Specifically, and in addition to working once again with CARA and SRC, we will also reach out to the World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) and local organisations and charities such as “Refuweegee” (<https://refuweegee.co.uk/>) which is a Glasgow charity that distributes welcome packs to newly arrived refugees.

Future Funding

When the initiative was established, it was agreed that up to £500 per year would be made available to the ARAR YAS members (in line with what each of the Scottish universities has agreed to cover for their members) to support their involvement in YAS activities (travel, accommodation, subsistence). Given that, by the time that cohort 3 is in place, there will be up to 12 members needing support from YAS, and this means an overall potential financial commitment of £30,000, we need to fundraise. It is unlikely, though, that the initiative will ever require the full budget as over the course of the past year, only £350 has been claimed. Members of the review team have suggested a number of options that should be explored:

- **Crowdfunding via Kickstarter.** This seems a good option because not only will it reach a wide audience if spread through the YAS and wider European and young academy networks, but it has the potential to raise the initiative’s profile and possibly to encourage other groups to introduce a similar programme.
- Presenting this initiative to the **Friends of the RSE** so that we may seek their advice on fundraising.

Impact beyond YAS

YAS is the first young academy in the world to bring ARAR professionals into its membership and in doing so it has had the full support of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. When the initiative was launched, Kehoe and Dr Eva Alisic (then co-chair of the Global Young Academy) wrote a joint letter to all of the European young academies and numerous senior academies to spread the word about what YAS was doing. Knowledge of our initiative is spreading and this has been supported by groups such as the Global Young Academy and the Dutch Young Academy, the main drivers for the Fresh Eyes on the Refugee Crisis workshop, which was held in Amsterdam in December 2015 to mobilise young academy research on refugee and migrant integration:

<https://globalyoungacademy.net/events/interdisciplinary-meeting-on-refugee-crisis-2/>

Additional impact:

- *February 2016:* Kehoe was invited by the Canadian College of New Scholars to speak about the organisation and activities of YAS and during her presentation she highlighted that the ARAR membership initiative was about to be launched. Many the College's members present felt that this is something that Canada should be doing too.
- *March 2017:* Kehoe was invited to speak about this initiative when presenting on the activities of the Global Young Academy's Global Migration and Human Rights working group at The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) workshop on the integration of refugee scientists, in Trieste, Italy.
- *March 2017:* Dr Nasar Meer was invited to speak at the European Commission's Science4Refugees workshop, "European Research with a view to integrating refugees" in Brussels. Unfortunately he was unable to make it due to illness.
- *May 2017:* Kehoe spoke about what YAS had been doing at the 7th annual AGM and scientific conference of the Global Young Academy (GYA) at Aviemore. This prompted about 10 members to begin planning a similar initiative for at-risk academics and refugee scientists.
- *May-August 2017:* The work of Kehoe and YAS in the field of refugee scientist integration is being included in a film commissioned by TWAS. Filming started in May, some of which took place at the RSE. Meer, Al-Dubae and Hamdon are also participating in this project.
- *Summer 2017:* The Global Young Academy is taking forward a paper (authored by Teresa Stoepler – USA) proposing the introduction of their own ARAR membership initiative.

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