



**American University of Beirut
University Scholarship Program
HES Award**

**YEAR THREE QUARTER THREE
NARRATIVE REPORT**

**COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT:
No. 72026818CA00002**

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A. Program Summary

The overarching goal of AUB, through the USAID Higher Education Scholarships (HES), is to increase the private sector competitiveness through increased workforce readiness linked to job opportunities. The project specifically aims to increase access to quality education and equip the beneficiary scholars with the necessary technical, soft, and leadership skills needed to excel in the labor market. Higher Education Scholarships (HES) at AUB will provide undergraduate scholarships, covering educational costs including a housing/transportation allowance and stipends to attend high-quality universities that promote critical thinking, freedom, diversity, and respect. HES consists of two components:

Component 1: The University Scholarship Program (USP VIII)

The University Scholarship Program – Phase Eight (USP VIII) which aims at enabling meritorious and financially disadvantaged Lebanese public and private school graduates to access quality higher education to increase their job readiness and maximize their potential in supporting Lebanon’s democratic and economic development.

Component 2: Refugee Scholarship Support (RSS)

HES will offer scholarships to non-Lebanese, having refugee status and are legally residing in Lebanon, to complete undergraduate studies. RSS allows the recruitment, selection, and enrollment of non-Lebanese refugee students.

B. Executive Summary

This report summarizes all the activities that took place during the period extending from April 1st, 2021 till June 30th, 2021. The narrative provides information on the recruitment activities that were conducted by AUB Office of Admissions related to HES Cycle III verification of applications, followed by shortlisting of HES Cycle III applicants, and finally the virtual Open Days. The first round of HES Cycle III shortlisting took place on May 20, 2021 followed by the concurrence of the HES Steering Committee on May 24, 2021. Due diligence screening and vetting of shortlisted applicants were then performed between May 24 and early June 2021. Virtual Open Days took place from Monday June 14 till Friday June 18, 2021.

C. Pre-Shortlisting Activities

C.1 Financial Aid Webinars

The recruitment team of AUB Office of Admissions delivered between April 1 and April 15, 2021 a total of 8 live webinars with a total of 51 attendees. The webinars were conducted on weekdays and on Saturdays after 4 pm. The webinar schedules were promoted and posted on the AUB website with all the details pertaining to dates, instructions, and links.

C. 2 Submission of HES Cycle III Applications and Supporting Documents

The deadline to submit the online USAID admissions applications and the online USAID financial aid applications for HES Cycle III that were previously set on March 31st, 2021 and April 15th,2021 respectively were not extended as multiple email reminders were sent to applicants who had incomplete applications. Applicants who weren't able to upload nor provide the required supporting documents were allowed to email these documents to hesis@aub.edu.lb. No applicant was able to apply online or to resume an incomplete application after these two preset deadlines. Following April 15th closing date, AUB Office of Admissions performed data verification, data cleansing, and financial aid verification as well as prepared USP VIII and RSS Cycle III eligible candidate lists for the first round of shortlisting.

C.3 Data Entry and Verification

Data Entry

AUB Office of Admissions started receiving HES-Cycle III online admission applications as of February, 2021. The recruitment and admission officers were trained to fulfill the below mentioned tasks:

- Verify submitted applications to ensure that all required fields are filled properly
- Enter data of received complete applications
- Verify uploaded documents by contacting applicants to ensure that all supporting documents were submitted. Applicants with missing documents were sent an email to secure missing documents

Complete applications were processed for data entry by recruitment officers and supporting staff members from AUB Office of Admissions while ensuring that the biographical data and chronological sequence of school years were clearly and accurately reflected on AUB Banner. Newly added public schools' and private schools' names were also coded on the Banner as per respective district(s). The data entry of all information related to applicants' academics, biography, and validation of these data against uploaded documents was finalized by the

end of April 2021. Then, the missing documents were verified and processed by the AUB Office of Admissions team.

Financial Aid Validation

After the completion of admission validation of all completed applications, a financial verification instructions manual was prepared and recruitment officers and supporting staff members from AUB Office of Admissions were trained on how to conduct the financial validation. All relevant financial information was verified for accuracy against the uploaded supporting documents provided by the applicant. Applicants were emailed and contacted to submit missing financial documents. Inconsistencies, such as a difference between the documented parent's job and the job statement provided by the employer or a discrepancy between the income stated in the online application and the income listed in the 'Income statement' were equally verified for accuracy. Then, the missing documents were verified and processed by the AUB Office of Admissions team. The financial aid verification of the data against uploaded documents was completed by end of April 2021. Only applicants with duly filled and submitted admission applications could fill their financial aid applications and only duly filled and submitted financial aid applications underwent financial validation.

Internal Control Procedures

i- Eligibility Criteria

Internal control procedures were installed to ensure that the eligibility criteria were met, for both components of the HES Award, through file verification once all data entry was completed. As per HES Award, eligibility criteria consist of the below:

Under USP VIII-Cycle III:

- Applicants must be Lebanese citizens
- Applicants must be attending a public high school or a private high school for the last three years
- Applicants must earn at least a cumulative combined average of 13.5/20 in their first two years of secondary schooling (Grades 10 and 11)
- Applicants must graduate from their respective schools in the summer of 2021
- Applicant parents must not receive an educational subsidy of \$5,000 or more

Under RSS:

- Applicants must be residing in Lebanon and holding a valid and a legal Lebanese residency permit issued by the Lebanese authorities
- Applicants must be attending a public high school or a private high school for the last three years

- Applicants must earn at least a cumulative combined average of 13.5/20 in their first two years of secondary schooling (Grades 10 and 11)
- Applicants must not be asylum seekers
- Applicants must graduate from their respective schools in the summer of 2021

C.4 Number of Applications Received

The total number of USP VIII-Cycle III admission applications that were submitted online was equal to 655, and the total number of RSS-Cycle III admission applications submitted online was equal to 258. While the total number of USP VIII-Cycle III financial aid applications that were submitted online was equal to 420, and the total number of RSS-Cycle III financial aid submitted online was equal to 161.

D. Shortlisting Applicants for HES Cycle III Open Days

D.1 Shortlisting Applicants

As per HES Award guidelines, 40% of applicants are shortlisted, consequently a meeting for the first-round selection of HES Cycle III applicants was held on May 20, 2021. Criteria that were studied for shortlisting included the below:

- School Grades (averages of grades 10 and 11 were compared to the averages generated for every district; hence, each applicant's grades were compared to the district grade average)
- Total Family Income (each applicant's family income was compared to the generated district income average)
- Gender Balance per District (if gender balance was not met within a district, then applicants were selected from adjacent districts making sure to maintain gender balance)

It is important to mention that the applicants' records were assessed based on the following two types of evaluation:

1. Average academic within each of the designated geographic regions (districts) in compliance with the specific award standards
2. Average need based on a multitude of financial information points aggregated by geographic region (district)

A final score of 50% of each of the above averages specified in numbers 1 and 2 (Need50Grade50) was computed helping in shortlisting the most eligible applicants.

After reviewing data on HES applicants, out of the 420 USP candidates who applied for the USP scholarship, 243 candidates were eligible based on the below eligibility criteria:

- Lebanese nationals holding Lebanese nationality
- Not holding US green cards, American passport, or asylum seekers
- Currently attending G12 in public and private schools in Lebanon and including those who did one year in the USA under the YES/ACCESS programs
- Having a cumulative combined average of 13.5/20 in Grades 10 and 11
- Having a total family income of \$11,500 and less (previously it was 30,000 USD which was equal to 45 million LBP at the rate of 1,508 L.L. The 45 million LBP family income threshold for HES Cycle III was then converted to USD at the rate of 3,900)

According to the HES Award, 40% of the eligible applicants must be shortlisted respecting the below distribution restriction percentages:

50/50 gender distribution

30% from Beirut and surroundings and 70% from rural areas

As for the RSS applicants, out of the 161 RSS candidates who applied for the RSS scholarship a total of 85 candidates were found eligible according to the below eligibility criteria:

- Non-Lebanese refugees who are legally residing in Lebanon holding a valid residency permit. Candidates with expired residency permits were still shortlisted making sure that their residency permits are renewed upon final selection.
- Not holding US green cards, American passports, or asylum seekers
- Currently attending G12 in public or private schools in Lebanon
- Having a cumulative combined average of 13.5/20 in Grades 10 and 11
- Having a total family income of \$11,500 and less (previously it was 30,000 USD which was equal to 45 million LBP at the rate of 1,508 L.L. The 45 million LBP family income threshold for HES Cycle III was then converted to USD at the rate of 3,900)

Since there are no distribution restrictions to be followed in the RSS shortlisting process, a total of 34 applicants were shortlisted to attend the HES Cycle III virtual Open Days.

In summary, a total of 97 USP VIII Cycle III applicants and a total of 34 RSS Cycle III applicants were shortlisted to participate in HES Cycle III Virtual Open Days that were scheduled to take place from Monday June 14 to Friday June 18, 2021.

D.2 HES Selection Steering Committee Meeting

The HES Selection Steering Committee meeting took place virtually on May 24, 2021.

Dr. M.T began the meeting with a brief summary of the recruitment process of the HES Cycle III highlighting that it was conducted completely online and took place between the months of January and March 2021. Dr. A. S also gave a short introduction of the recruitment activities of HES Cycle III stating that the activities began in January 2021. Dr. A. S stated that upon submission of applications, the AUB Office of Admissions validated the submitted documents and contacted applicants who had missing documents. After data validation and verification of submitted applications, the first round of HES Cycle III shortlisting was conducted whereby 40% of eligible applicants under USP VIII as well as RSS were shortlisted. Due diligence screening is expected to be completed followed by the virtual Open Days. Final selection will then be conducted after the BACC II results are released by the MEHE.

Ms. R. J. then briefed attendees on the shortlisting process that was conducted on May 20, 2021. Ms. R. J. explained that out of 420 USP applicants, 243 were found eligible (eligibility criteria: (1) Being a Lebanese national holding Lebanese nationality, (2) Not holding US green card, American passport, and not an asylum seeker, (3) Currently attending G12 in private or public school in Lebanon, (4) have an average GPA for G10 and G11 of 13.5/20 or above). Under the RSS component, 161 applicants completed the application and a total of 85 candidates were found eligible (Eligibility criteria: (1) Having a Lebanese residency, (2) Not holding US green card or American passport and not an asylum seeker, (3) Currently attending G12 in private or public school in Lebanon, (4) have an average GPA for G10 and G11 of 13.5/20 or above). As per HES Award guidelines, 40% of USP applicants were then shortlisted based on academic merit, financial need, a 50-50 gender distribution, as well as the requirement that 30% of the applicants must be from Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and the remaining 70% from the other areas of Lebanon. The final number of shortlisted USP VIII Cycle III candidates was 97. Similarly, 40% of RSS Cycle III candidates were shortlisted based on the composite score of financial need and academic merit. The final number of shortlisted RSS Cycle III candidates was 34.

E. HES Cycle III Due Diligence & Vetting

On Thursday June 10, 2021, AUB Office of Admissions completed due diligence screening of all shortlisted HES Cycle III candidates as well as their parents. All candidates had clear due diligence records. The websites that were used for the due diligence procedure (as per HES Award guidelines) are mentioned below:

http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/aq_sanctions_list

<http://www.treasury.gov/ofac/downloads/t11sdn.pdf>

<https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM>

N.B. The SAM website has been recently updated and new instructions on how to conduct due diligence screening using this website were communicated by the USAID-AOR to the HES team.

Vetting for HES Cycle III shortlisted candidates was also conducted during the month of June 2021 on PVS Portal as per instructions by USAID-AOR and the Vetting Support Unit. A total of 128 shortlisted candidate PIFs were submitted on PVS instead of 131 since 2 USP and 1 RSS candidates declined the scholarship. To date of this report, eligibility letters of HES Cycle III shortlisted candidates have not been received.

F. Open Days

During the last week of May and first week of June 2021, the HES team started planning for the Open Days. A number of meetings were held between the HES team, the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS), and the Financial Aid department to discuss and agree on the logistics of both the leadership and financial interviews of shortlisted USP VIII and RSS Cycle III candidates that were scheduled to take place between Monday June 14, and Friday June 18, 2021. Like last year, the Open Days were conducted virtually for HES Cycle III due to COVID – 19 pandemic and subsequent preventive measures.

After completing due diligence screening, the list of all HES Cycle III shortlisted candidates was posted on AUB-USP website. Shortlisted candidates were then called and informed that they were shortlisted for the first round of HES Cycle III selection. Candidates received two phone calls from the American University of Beirut - AUB (One from CCECS and the other from the Office of Admissions) to inform them about their shortlisting and the virtual interviews date and time. Candidates were asked to confirm over the phone their emails and emergency phone numbers, and they were requested to download zoom application on their phones or laptops. Candidates were also informed that they will sit alone for a virtual leadership interview and a virtual financial interview between June 14 and June 18, 2021, and the candidate's breadwinner will sit alone for a virtual financial interview between June 14 and June 18, 2021.

Consequently, HES Cycle III shortlisted candidates received two emails for the Leadership and Financial Interview as follows:

- An email for the leadership interview (sent by CCECS) including the date and time of the interview in addition to the Zoom link. This interview was conducted via Zoom with the shortlisted candidate alone and was recorded.
- An email for the financial interview (sent by Office of Admissions) including the date and time of the interview in addition to the Zoom link. The candidate first sat alone for the financial

interview, and the interview was recorded. Afterwards, the candidate's breadwinner sat for the financial interview alone, and the meeting was recorded as well.

HES Cycle III Open Days then took place smoothly as scheduled from June 14 to June 18, 2021. All shortlisted candidates attended the open days except for three candidates (2 USP and 1 RSS) who refused the scholarship.

G. EEE Exam

HES Cycle III shortlisted candidates sat for the EEE Assessment on June 21, June 22, and June 23 at 9 am in Nicely 500. Candidates were split into three groups and a total of 43, 43, and 42 (128 in total) candidates were expected to sit for the assessment on each scheduled date. A total of 127 candidates sat for the EEE assessment instead of 131 since 4 candidates refused the scholarship.

H. Conclusion and Upcoming Activities

In conclusion, this quarter began by receiving the HES-Cycle III applications and ended with the completion of data management process, due diligence and vetting, and Open Days. In the upcoming quarter, final selection of HES Cycle III candidates will take place once the BACC II official exam results are out and upon the receipt of HES Cycle III eligibility letters by the Vetting Support Unit. HES Cycle III selected candidates for AY 21-22 will then be contacted to confirm acceptance of the scholarship and to attend the HES Cycle III Orientation (date to be determined in due time).