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## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SYMPOSIUM

### I. Curriculum Development and Modernization

1. The increase in student numbers, and the overcapacity admissions, as well as the accelerated opening of new universities, are moving the higher education system in Iraq towards mass production of graduates. This necessitates an in-depth examination of the institutional structure of higher education, subject specialties, the curricula, the teaching methods and examinations and assessments to ensure that the quality of the graduates meets the standards and levels of performance required by the expanding needs of the market and the socio-economic development of the country.
2. Curriculum development of requires consideration of the following:
  - a. The desirability of a change to a system of modularization and credit accumulation, whereby the curriculum is divided into separate elements (modules, each worth a given number of credits), which are separately delivered and assessed and can be combined and accumulated to form award-bearing programmes of study. This should provide flexibility in designing programmes of subject specialties able to meet the needs of the market in a dynamic way. Students graduated in a major subject area would be able to include another specialty, for which there is a timely demand, within their overall programmes. A useful by-product would be the encouragement of interdisciplinary relations among academics and departments.





## **II- Higher Education Policy and Strategies**

1. For higher education to meet the reconstruction needs of Iraq:
  - a. Plans spanning a well-defined period (say 5-10 years) should be developed at all levels to address the post-war needs and to take advantage of national and international investment.
  - b. The higher education structures adopted should aim to maximize high-quality graduates and to keep administrative activities to the minimum consistent with different operations.
  - c. The aims of the student learning opportunity should follow from identified needs.
  - d. There is a need to develop an enthusiastic team of competent university teachers able to adapt to educational innovations and to inspire students to work effectively as individuals and in teams.
  - e. Curricula should be based on appropriate outcomes and capabilities. They should focus first on outputs and only then on inputs to the learning process. To this end academic departments should work together rather than in isolation.
  - f. Development of teaching materials in support of the curricula should be a collaborative effort.
  - g. Class size should be designed to suit the students' learning process and active learning with interactive contacts with the tutors.
  - h. Enrollment policies need to aim at recruiting enthusiastic students, determined to succeed at the highest level of which they are capable.
  - i. Monitoring and follow-up systems should be put in place to assess progress and to adjust plans and systems as necessary.
  
2. Consideration needs to be given to the relationships between higher education and industry and commerce. Schemes such as industry-led engineering education and project-led education are worthy of serious attention and may meet immediate needs of both universities and professional institutions. Noting the present difficulties facing industry and other components of the Iraq economy, such schemes could initially be piloted at the post-graduate level, with a view to their extension, when relationships with capable industrial partners mature.



3. In the light of the present situation in Iraq and the relative security enjoyed by the Kurdistan region, where resources are available, regional plans may be developed for universities and other institutions. The regional higher education sector could serve as template for many components of higher education, which could be adopted more widely at appropriate times.
4. The urgent need for up-to-date information in higher education demands that immediate steps be taken to radically rethink the present rather out-dated and long neglected university library systems. *Information and Learning Centres* should be established taking note of the following:
  - a. Major changes have affected library services. The scale and range of information resources have increased dramatically, requiring greater levels of subject expertise and effective communication.
  - b. A high level of understanding of new information and communication technologies has become essential. Many provisions are now in the form of electronic media, and access to data bases and information networking through the Internet has become common practice. Automated data and information management is now quite common.
  - c. Budgetary requirements and the need to demonstrate value-for-money have increased the challenges for library managers.
  - d. Resource sharing, the creation of online public access catalogues and inter-university and national library lending systems can be translated into intra-net and inter-net Networks for data and information, linking all high education establishments.
  - e. The acquisition of printed and electronic materials should be conducted through an organization common to all the high education institutions to obtain favorable terms through collective bargaining. This includes subscriptions to electronic journals and access to data banks.
  - f. The development of information literacy skills should be promoted within the academic community to enable it to make effective use of the wealth of information available via the new media. New curricula should be developed, recognizing the importance of these skills at all levels.
  - g. A fundamental review of the arrangements in education for information management to provide the high-level work force required for modern libraries or information and learning centres. The advent of the electronic library has radically affected the approach to librarianship education.



5. A creative policy is needed for the provision of learning resources and teaching materials for both students and teachers. Most of what is available is priced beyond the reach of individuals of the academic community and a collective purchasing scheme for all high education establishments is called for, see 4e above.

This could take the form of a holding company or syndicate with all universities and institutions as its shareholders. It could enter into collective bargaining to acquire copyrights and other intellectual property rights from publishers and other owners of such rights. It could then carry out the following under license for the Iraq market:

- a. production of electronic media materials,
- b. printing of books and other publications using the local printers and university presses,
- c. importation and distribution of books and electronic media materials,
- d. importation and sales of related equipment,
- e. support of writing and other creative efforts by Iraqi academics to develop teaching materials, and assistance in their production and distribution.



### **III- University Scientific Research**

1. Scientific research in Iraqi universities and university research centres needs radical rethinking to align it with the requirements of the national economy and to make it cost-effective. The present situation is characterised by many problems including a lack of recourses, insufficient qualified manpower and general systemic weaknesses. The strategy for the future should aim to:
  - a. Establish a stable and sustainable financial base.
  - b. Ensure effective leadership and management at all levels.
  - c. Create a positive environment for research, in which staff potentials can be maximized.
  - d. Focus investment on the strongest research and a relatively small number of themes
  - e. Promote collaborative research at both national and international levels.
  - f. Measure performance and benchmark it against international standards on an ongoing basis.
  - g. Regularly review the effectiveness of the strategy.
2. To progress from the present difficult situation and to ensure the growth of a healthy and productive university research environment, The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research should:
  - a. Undertake a critical review of the universities, to identify the departments that are able to provide adequate postgraduate studies and research opportunities of internationally acceptable standards. The criteria should include a well-qualified staff, acceptable research facilities, good library resources, good supervision, and where appropriate, links with high-standing foreign universities and research centres.
  - b. Restrict postgraduate studies to departments that that meet the above criteria. Others departments should be supported to build up their research capabilities through association with the qualified ones, e.g. in joint staff research. Only when a department has reached a proven research capacity, should it be allowed to offer its own postgraduate studies.
3. Iraqi universities should be encouraged to seek international funding for research jointly with high-standing foreign universities and research institutions.



## **IV- Collaboration and Twinning**

1. Iraqi universities are called upon to seek collaborative relations with high-standing foreign universities and research institutions which are well-placed to help in updating and upgrading their Iraqi partners. Relations may start with memoranda of co-operation (memoranda of understanding) outlining the principles and areas of co-operation, which need to be followed up by defined schemes specifying objectives, actions, timetable and funding. These can cover both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The initial step must involve academic staff establishing direct contacts through planned visits, at the present by Iraqis to their colleagues in the partner institutions. It is through such contacts that areas and subjects of co-operation can be specified, co-operative plans can be worked out, and the involvement of other staff (and students) agreed. Sources of funding that may be approached can also be explored.
2. Collaboration with British and other universities and institutions can take various forms including:
  - a. Joint curriculum development or possible franchising of courses from collaborating institutions.
  - b. Training courses (workshops/summer schools) to update and upgrade Iraqi academic and senior administrative staff
  - c. Short programmed visits by Iraqi academics to establish one-to-one contacts to explore common interest and to develop plans for joint work.
  - d. Schemes for visiting professors from collaborating institutions focused on specific subjects and involving the delivery of taught undergraduate and post-graduate courses.
  - e. Joint research and research supervision.
  - f. Networking and exploring the potentialities of e-learning, initially at postgraduate level.
  - g. Postgraduate students, especially those under joint supervision, and their supervisors should be given time and means to make visits (say 3 months to 1 year) to carry out research and graduate studies at collaborating institutions.
  - h. On-line contacts by staff, students and libraries between collaborating institutions should be facilitated.
  - i. Joint exploration of sources of financing of funding and joint formulations of research proposals to be made to funding agencies.
3. The Iraqi universities and the Ministry of Higher Education should co-operate in working out model agreements for collaboration with foreign universities outlining general remits and principles along with



programmes of implementation and systems for evaluation and follow-up. Existing agreements could usefully be examined as prototypes.

4. Twinning unlike collaboration is a specific act of co-operation calling for a mutual relationship which may entered at the university, college, institute, or department level. Within it both partners take joint responsibility for the students and programmes under joint care. The extent and terms of reference and conditions, including financial ones, for the mutual relationship must be clearly defined from the outset by partners who are fully acquainted with each other in all things pertinent to the relationship.
5. Universities are generally under severe financial constraints and don't have open access to resources. Thus universities in Iraq must approach potential partners with care and be ready to join with them in exploring possible sources of finance. British and other European universities have available to them European Union funding for projects involving universities in developing countries, but, in order to access these funds, they must be in partnership with local universities. On the other hand, international organizations, such as UNESCO, WHO, FAO, etc. are able to fund projects in universities in developing countries, but must generally be presented with well prepared requests from a member state. Some national bodies, such as the British Council, may have schemes that can be accessed by universities. Some of these are open world-wide while others are region or country specific. In all cases, proposals to funding bodies need to be well prepared. They have to be written in a highly formulated way for which serious training is required. It is therefore proposed that the Iraqi universities and other institutions, together with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research should organize training workshops on drafting such proposals. Other topics which might also be included are drafting CV's and research proposals. Organisations such as The European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA) may help in this respect.
6. Cooperation with industry and commerce is recognized as a must for educational and research establishments. Iraqi universities may benefit from the RAWABIT programme developed for Iraq by the British Council. It is particularly useful for vocational schools and professional institutions, but may be expanded to others.
7. In the medical education fields, the British medical professional associations and colleges may be contacted by the medical faculties in Iraqi universities to establish professional relations at the educational and examination levels. Expatriate Iraqi professionals working in the medical-pharmaceutical fields could be instrumental in establishing viable linkages. Likewise, similar relations may be developed in the engineering and other professional fields such as accountancy, insurance, banking, surveying and architecture.



## **V- Private Higher Education**

1. The private sector has the potential to deliver quality education free from financial constraints affecting the state institutions. It should be given the attention and support it deserves, so that it can play an effective role in the wider higher education sector developing in the new Iraq.
2. To ensure the adherence of private institutions to higher educational standards an assessment of the existing private universities should be undertaken by an independent commission of highly qualified academics and professionals appointed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Its terms of reference should include the definition of quality assurance standards and the application of them. If any college or department falls short of the minimum quality requirements, its closure should be recommended, unless immediate measures are taken to remedy the situation.
3. A new law should be promulgated governing the private higher education sector, giving the private universities independence in running their own affairs, with supervision by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research restricted to academic matters and exercised through an independent commission as above.
4. To encourage the expansion of the private sector as an active complement to the state universities and institutions will require incentives making it attractive to national and international investors and sponsors.
5. The presence of foreign universities, as a further complementary part of higher education, should be carefully considered and could take many forms, e.g.
  - a. franchising courses and degrees to Iraqi institutions
  - b. branching within Iraqi institutions
  - c. opening independent branches in Iraq
  - d. establishing new universities in Iraq, on for example the lines of the American University in Beirut.