

K-19 Task Force

Minutes of Meeting, August 4, 2022

Agenda

American University of Kurdistan

09:30-15:00

Review of Year 1

General Assessment of Role/Charge of TF

Membership and its involvement

Meeting schedule/frequency/format

Updates and Future Action Item

University Admissions

TVET

K-12 Curriculum

Draft Law

Lunch

Further Discussion Item

Workforce Development – Pathways to TVET and University

Public Presentation on Progress of TF

Other Business

Attending

Bashdar Sarbaz, MoE

Shelan Khalil, MoE

AbdulSalam Medeni, Rwanda

Abdulqader Kakasur, UNICEF

Behar Ali, Emma Organization for Human Development

Dr. Amanj Saeed, MoHESR

Dr. Mohammad Ahmed, MoHESR

Dr. Naznaz Muhamad, former MP, Education Committee

Dr. Soran Saeed, Sulaimani Polytechnic

Dr. Zana Ibrahim, UKH

Dr. Galawezh Obaid Osman, MP, Education Committee

Vida Hanna, CUE

Dr. Randall Rhodes, AUK

Observers

Reben Fadhel, CUE

Zana Saleh, AUK

Meeting called to order at 09:45.

Agenda

All members were invited to contribute to a discussion of the progress of the TF during its first year. Focus was on the relevance/importance of its role, yet discussion also touched on the status of the work groups and their respective agendas. Notes below are first grouped by theme, and then comments specific to the progress of the recommendations/proposals of the workgroups.

Discussion Points:

- The TF needs to move towards operationalizing its discussion points – formatting the ideas as policy recommendations, which will result in **actions**.
- The concept of a TF is new to Kurdistan. Its role is to assist in the reform of current structures by proposing solutions to address challenges/obstacles across education. Efforts should focus on technical issues that can be submitted to decision-makers. It can design pilots for implementation by the Ministries.
- More needs to be accomplished in achieving credibility across government. A well designed symposium/forum will help to advance this. We also need to clarify the TF's role in governmental policy development and implementation.
- It may be appropriate to develop by-laws to clarify the role of the TF.
- The TF is already addressing some pivotal issues; others include school buildings, curriculum development, funding, disability support services, gender equity, capacity building for teachers/instructors and administrators, integration of children/students from the IDP and refugee camps. Mentioned within the Charge of the TF is the issue of the organizational/administrative structures of the Ministries.
- Discussions and recommendations need to respect the diversity of schools and universities within Kurdistan, and the impact of highly structured regulations on school/institutional autonomy.
- The strength of the TF is the diversity of experience, knowledge, and perspectives of its membership; this enriches the discussion, and hopefully, the outcomes.
- Additional international and regional experts should be engaged. While the number of members on the TF needs to be kept low and include only those committed to continual participation, others can be invited to work group meetings/discussions and invited to present their views at the monthly meetings (as was done this past year by TVET and University Admissions). Such connections may be valuable to support grant and proposal writing.
- There need to be more informational or discussion sessions with decision-makers; these may focus on TF agenda items or current initiatives within the Ministries, Parliament, or other bodies across the KRG.
- Meetings will continue to be scheduled for once-per-month.

- Electronic platforms for the sharing and publication of information may be valuable for the dissemination/sharing of information, internally and externally.
- A high level of hopelessness persists among the youth. While this has been communicated to the Ministries, it may be more effective to identify strategies to address these concerns, especially in regard to the urgency of the implementation of TVET and higher educational reforms to improve workforce preparedness. The private sector will also need to be involved as the current economy cannot accommodate high school and university graduates even if their skill sets are upscaled.
- There needs to be an inventory of current national/ministry data sets; the data must be analyzed to identify gaps in the research/data; an understanding of the situation will better inform discussions and recommendations (e.g. learning assessments, graduation rates by discipline/profession), and research needed to be conducted.
- Any change will be met by push back – people cling to the status quo; we just need to be prepared for the predicted opposition by being very public and transparent.

Work Groups

The University Admissions and TVET work groups mapped out strategies and submitted documents for TF review to operationalize reform within the current system(s). It is very important that work groups periodically submit such reports to the TF that identify issues and include roadmaps for action.

University Admissions Exam

- The issue was researched; international experts were invited to participate in discussions; a proposal was drafted and revised based on feedback and international models; the proposal was voted upon and approved by members of the TF; the proposal was presented to decision-makers at MoHESR and Parliament.
- Additional decision-makers need to be engaged (Council of Higher Education, etc.); the nation needs to understand the rationale for a structural change in the university admissions process. This engagement can be on the personal level or via a public forum/symposium.
- Discussions need to include TVET; both are complimentary as they aim to realign post-secondary education to better meet current and future workforce needs.

TVET

- There is a roadmap for implementation: TVET I was approved; the TVET Law will go to Parliament, then it can be enacted.

- The UNESCO documents and roadmaps were translated into Kurdish through TF funds.
- TVET reform and expansion impacts Grade 9, Grade 12, and higher education; it also involves the Ministry of Labor & Social Affairs and Ministry of Planning. Therefore, a holistic approach needs to be presented with a view to infusing the new approach/mindset into the regulations of all of the above – an infusion across the whole system – multiple owners.

Draft Law

After receiving the input from the TF, the Education Committee of Parliament met with the Ministry of Education to review a set of revisions to the draft law. The revisions were adopted.

Accreditation

The KRG has approved the formation of an accreditation body, linked to the PM's Office, to independently set standards and provide assessment and monitoring of schools and universities. Only a few details of its charge have been publicized. TF members involved in the initiative were asked to share information and suggest how the TF could participate.

The accreditation body is currently in the process of reviewing and adopting/adapting standards written by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. While all schools and universities will be required to meet the standards as written and approved, there will need to be flexibility to accommodate the diversity of public, private, international, for-profit, and not-for-profit institutional models currently in Kurdistan. There will also need to be mechanisms for capacity-building within the schools and universities to assist them in reaching the benchmarks and addressing deficiencies.

An important discussion item would be the development of a Kurdistan-specific definition of educational and student "success". For schools, it would be focused on students' persistence to graduation and meeting learning outcomes per grade level. For universities, it should be employment rates rather than graduation numbers that are studied, though there are external issues that are beyond the control of the educational system. In other countries, funding is tied to the school's/university's ability to reach the targets.

The accreditation body's agenda and the TF's agenda are complimentary. It is hoped that there are joint sessions to maximize information sharing and effectiveness.

Workforce Development

The recurrent theme through all discussions, at all levels, is to ensure that school and university graduates are prepared for employment as outlined in Vision 2030. UNESCO

conducted a market needs assessment from 2015-2018 that looked at key economic sectors across Iraq. The findings, published in 2019, are highly pertinent to the development of programming under TVET.

Market studies need to be institutionalized, either conducted annually or every two or three years. These would identify dynamic and sustainable skills expected by employers. The practice would also support a more effective interface between academia and industry that will inform curriculum building and capacity building. We need to teach for the future, not to the standards of the past.

Regarding university outputs, a similar study will need to be conducted regarding the medical, engineering, English-language, humanities, and social science disciplines/sectors. Research will inform the need for shifts in university staffing and perhaps the elimination or downsizing of academic programs/colleges. This will impact the approval of new institutes/universities and new academic programs. While this will challenge the status quo and result in great resistance as programs and faculty become redundant, an intermediary step may be to upscale existing curricula to increase their relevance.

A theme that must be infused across all secondary and higher education curricula is entrepreneurship. A start-up culture needs to be nurtured among the youth in order to expand the possibilities within the private sector. The MoE mentioned implementing a textbook/curriculum from India on the topic of entrepreneurship.

Agenda Moving Forward

Philosophy/Approach of Education

- A statement must be developed defining the importance/role of education in Kurdistan, especially in regard to the development of good, productive, socially aware citizens.
- There needs to be articulated a set of learning outcomes for each stage of education in order to inform the development of a curricular framework that can be adapted to specific grade levels, and eventually, the disciplines.
- The document would also need to tackle the relative autonomy available to schools and universities.

Early Childhood Education

- K-19 is charged with looking at the whole spectrum of the educational experience. As the TF has discussed the transition from secondary/higher education to the workplace, attention must also be paid to the transition from home to school. Issues for discussion may include: building design, disability,

gender equity, social and ethnic cultural issues and stereotypes, kindergarten, first-grade as delayed entry point, first-year curriculum.

University Admissions & TVET

- Both agendas need to complement each other; this will strengthen the narrative and its presentation to decision-makers and the public.
- Discussion should include the fact-finding of the work groups, stakeholder (student) perceptions, and community-centered reform. Data and evidence should strengthen the arguments.

Symposium/Forum

Members agreed that it is time to stage a public event to present the work of the TF to decision-makers and the public. It is important that the venue be highly accessible for the target audience. Venues in Erbil will be investigated. Preliminary discussion identified the latter half of October for the event.

A meeting was scheduled for August 14 at CUE to discuss the program and logistics for the event.

Meeting adjourned at 15:10.