

K-19 Task Force

Minutes of Meeting, December 9, 2021

UKH

Agenda:

10:30-12:15 Working Group Sessions

- 1. University Admissions**
- 2. TVET**
- 3. K-12 Curriculum**

12:15-1:00 Lunch

1:00 – 3:00 Full Task Force Session

3:00 - 3:15 Coffee Break

3:15 - 4:15 Full Task Force, continues

Attending the full session of the Task Force:

Shelan Khalil (ME)

Abdulqader Kakasur (UNICEF)

Dr. Galawezh Obaid Othman (Education and Higher Education Committee, Parliament)

Vida Hanna (CUE)

Behar Ali (EMMA)

Dr. Amanj Saeid (MHE)

Dr. Mohammad Ahmed (MHE)

Dr. Naznaz Muhamad (Education Committee, Parliament)

Dr. Zana Ibrahim (UKH)

Kirstin Crawford (UKH)

Dr. Randall Rhodes (AUK)

AbdulSalam Medeni (Rwanga)

Absent:

Bashdar Sarbaz (ME)

Salih Akyol (Zakho BIS)

Jayne Laurina B McAdam (Duhok BIS)

Dr. Soran Saeed (SPU)

Sherwan Mohammed Mahdi (GIZ)

Dr. Mildred Libot, AUK

Nashwan Mohammed (British Council)

Dr. Izaddin Ahmad Aziz (Salahaddin University)

Dr. Honar Issa (AUK)

Note: Members of the TVET Work Group were not in attendance on December 9. Therefore, there was no meeting of that Work Group or report on their progress.

Morning Work Group Sessions

University Admissions Work Group

December 2: The work group met virtually to discuss two strategies: the introduction of a new university entrance exam and the introduction of a more liberal formula for the balancing of multiple metrics for the admission decision-making process. The current high school exit exam is a very weak indicator of student achievement and potential. The results are biased as the standard deviation is narrow with an increasing number of students achieving over 90%. If a university admission exam is introduced, then we must be assured that it will introduce more integrity into the decision-making process. No matter what proposal is promoted by the Task Force, the MHE and TF members will need to work to “sell” it to the public.

December 7: The work group met with Dr. Khatab Ahmed Mustafa, Director-General of Education Planning and Follow-Up to review the current platform used for university admissions.

December 9: There was discussion of news that a new draft law on national grade exams was presented by the MoE to the Cabinet of Ministers. Point 98.2 addresses factors to be used in university admissions: national exams, ministerial exam, formula for weighting the scores, etc. There was also a further discussion of the proposal in development.

K-12 Curriculum Building Work Group

Virtual meetings were held to identify the central issues for future conversations. A PowerPoint was developed for presentation at the general meeting of the TF on December 9.

General Meeting of the Task Force

Called to Order at 1:05

University Admissions

Repeat of issue - an insufficient number of seats at universities for all high school graduates. If the system needs to introduce a level of selectivity, then there need to be mechanisms to better distinguish between university candidates in respect to their past academic accomplishments and future potential.

Currently, admissions decisions are solely made based on HS scores/exit exams administered by the Ministry of Education. The Central Admissions System Platform has 3 Structural Aspects:

- Algorithm to calculate the GPA to student’s advantage: Grade 12, Grades 10-12, including/excluding Arabic/Kurdish, emphasis on courses specific to target discipline, and combinations of these data points.
- Students’ selection of public universities/departments; students select up to 50 from list.
- Placement of students into universities/departments as per ranking within pool based on GPA calculation, credit calculation (specially for medicine and engineering), geographic location.

Under the structure outlined in the current draft law submitted by the MoE, students will be taking 4 major exams: after 10th grade, after 11th grade, after 12th grade, and a HS certification exam. Tests are multiple choice with a focus on disciplinary knowledge.

The work group proposes that first, the Ministerial Exam (HS certification exam) be replaced by a University Admissions Exam under the purview of the MoHESR. Assessment needs to address skill sets (e.g. problem solving, quantitative reasoning, scientific reasoning, critical thinking) and disciplinary knowledge, possibly modeled on the SAT 1 and SAT 2. Of prime importance is the need to identify test question writers who understand assessment tools and the alignment of the questions to the objectives of the tool.

Second is the timeline for the administration of the University Entrance Exam and beginning of the fall semester. This Exam would be administered in June or early July. Scores would be available in mid-August, at the latest.

If students elect for the do-over to raise their scores, students will thereby miss the fall semester start date and be moved to the next university entry date. This would ensure that the fall semester start date is confirmed far in advance; universities can plan accordingly, and students will start as unified cohorts.

Third, research (focus groups and surveys) need to be conducted to gauge the acceptability of these measures. Not only is data needed on the public's acceptance of a universal university entrance exam, but the design of the exam is important to ensure that it meets the primary objective - to improve selectivity. Then, what formula/balance should be instituted to properly weight the new data points with the national exams?

Discussion Points:

- Ministerial vs. national definitions: national exams involve national participation in writing questions and scoring/logistics; ministerial exams only have the MoE involved in question writing and scoring. National exams could take into consideration local languages and cultural issues.
- 9th grade assessment was only to distinguish students unable to proceed down the academic path, siphoning off those appropriate for technical and vocational training. Year-end exams for grades 10, 11, and 12 needed to assess learning of those years.
- Integrity and professionalism in exam question writing: pool of questions coming from universities based on student learning outcomes.
- Timeline for exams: after the last day of class, there are 25 days of vacation before exam cycle; 2-3 days between HS exams – as there are 7 subjects, this takes weeks; 10 days for scores; 1 week for appeals. Then, if a student wants a do-over, the timeline is extended way into the fall.
- Draft law: need for TF to present its proposal/argument during the period between the first and second readings of the law in Parliament.

K-12 Curriculum Building

While the education system and the school textbooks underwent revision in 2007, years of war against terrorism and economic crises have had a considerable negative impact on the education sector. In 2012, an Iraqi National Curriculum Framework document was developed between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, with support from UNESCO; alas this framework was not translated into a comprehensive curriculum/syllabus; it was only used to

develop the life skills course textbooks, which was deemed a success. But the history reveals that there is a lack of clarity among stakeholders between textbooks and what constitutes a curriculum.

Three challenges were cited: 1) Textbooks are not responsive to the fast-changing world and regional job market, 2) There is a lack of a Learning Vision, and 3) Teachers are inadequately prepared, conceptually and in respect to disciplinary knowledge, for the demands of a student-centered classroom of the 21st century.

Recommendations cited include: 1) The design and implementation of a curriculum, 2) Textbooks should be reviewed to respond to both the demands of a curriculum and the job market, and 3) Teacher capacity should be strengthened.

Discussion Points:

- National Learning Assessment – 4th grade: math and science scores – 60/50% of students do not perform at expected levels
- Textbooks not to market need; without holding the copyright, it is impossible to edit/customize content for Kurdistan; takes 2-3 years to revise a textbook.
- Curriculum needs to be redesigned to meet KRG 2030 projections for job market
- Conceptual issue of teaching vs. educating students; ensure competency-based, student-centered culture; the commitment/mentality of teachers; pervasive culture of cynicism
- Need to design a framework for curriculum, a holistic view; identify the SLOs for each subject at each grade level.
- Past initiatives have been project-based; there needs to be a holistic approach to education, looking at it systemically – K-12.
- Next step: a research review of initiatives and reports of the past.

The Catholic University of Erbil has offered to host the next meeting of the Task Force. It will be scheduled toward the end of January. A Doodle poll will be distributed to identify the best date. The start time will be 10:00; same agenda format.

Meeting adjourned at 4:10.
