

K-19 Task Force

Minutes of Meeting, February 3, 2022

Catholic University of Kurdistan

Agenda:

10:00-12:00 Working Group Sessions

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

12:00-1:00 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:

Ms. Shelan Khalil (MoE)
Mr. Abdulqader Kakasur (UNICEF)
Ms. Vida Hanna (CUE)
Ms. Behar Ali (EMMA)
Dr. Amanj Saeid (MoHESR)
Dr. Mohammad Ahmed (MoHESR)
Dr. Naznaz Muhamad (Education Committee, Parliament)
Dr. Soran Saeed (SPU)
Dr. Mildred Libot, (AUK)
Mr. Nashwan Mohammed (British Council)
Dr. Zana Ibrahim (UKH)
Ms. Kirstin Crawford (UKH)
Dr. Randall Rhodes (AUK)
Mr. AbdulSalam Medeni (Rwanga)
Mr. Bashdar Sarbaz (MoE)

Absent

Mr. Salih Akyol (BIS)
Dr. Honar Issa (AUK)
Dr. Galawezh Obaid Othman (Education and Higher Education Committee, Parliament)

Guests

Dr. Khattab Shekhany (General Director, MoHESR)
Mr. Hassan Sartip (General Director of Curriculum, MoE)
Mr. Hardi Maroof (Director of Examination, MoE)
Ms. Aram Ibrahim Qanbar (Director of Central Admissions, MoHESR)
Mr. Ibrahim Rashid Hasan (Director of Private Universities, MoHESR)
Dr. Fathima Rashid Hasan Al Bajalani (Salahhadin University)

General Meeting of the Task Force

Called to Order at 1:15

University Admissions

A PowerPoint was quickly presented outlining issues discussed previously including 1) the need for the university admissions process to be more selective as the number of applicants is greater than the number of available seats at state universities (53,00 this year), 2) the use of high school scores/exit exams administered by the Ministry of Education, and 3) the introduction of a university entrance exam including challenges with its design, timeline, student repeats, integrity of exam administration, and positive and negative wash back.

Complicating the proposal for change is the pending draft law submitted by the MoE and its plan for high school year-end exams. Unfortunately, few members of the Task Force have seen details of the draft law.

The morning session of the work group was also attended by Dr. Fathima Rashid Hasan Al Bajalani (Salahhadin University), Dr. Khattab Shekhany (MoHESR), Mr. Hardi Maroof (MoE), Ms. Aram Ibrahim Qanbar (MoHESR), and Mr. Ibrahim Rashid Hasan. The discussion centered on the MoE's structure for the design and oversight of the national/ministerial exams, including the exam format, integrity measures, membership and responsibilities of the High Committee of General Examination, and testing of the exam by teachers. UNICEF had provided training in the methodology of exam question writing, however, the process for the annual writing of the exam neither includes international experts nor capacity building for the High Committee's eleven members. It was stated that there is no expertise in exam writing within the MoE. The work group brought up concerns over the assessment of results and whether they lead to improvements in the system, score inflation, and how the High Committee ensures that these year-end exams measure (or are aligned with teaching and learning in the classroom) – the feedback loop.

Dr. Khattab broke down the proposal for a university entrance exam into foundational questions needing to be addressed:

1. Should we add an exam? – Consensus – “yes”. It appears that Iraq is a very rare example of a country that does implement/require a university entrance exam.
2. Who will administer? – Consensus – “MoHESR”. Clearly, there would need to be collaboration with the MoE as the latter already has an exam structure and logistical network in place.
3. What should be the basic exam format? The proposal was for the exam to be structured into two sections: general skill assessment and subject/discipline knowledge. The first would be for all exam takers and focus on critical thinking, problem solving, communication, information fluency, etc., while the latter could be divided into 2 or 4 subjects (e.g. medical and health sciences; engineering, IT and math; social sciences and humanities; arts and language; or just natural and technical sciences vs. social sciences, humanities and arts). Students would be able to take multiple subject exams to reflect their broader disciplinary/professional interests. There are international exams currently in use at select Kurdistan universities (e.g. UKAT at UKH); these may serve as models.
4. What would be the new timeline? To ensure a definitive start date for fall semester that matches expectations within the Bologna Process, all exams would need to be administered and scored by the end of July or beginning week of August. This would require the grade 12

year-end exam to be administered in May or early June. Only if students qualify for the high school diploma will they be eligible to take the university entrance exam.

5. How many attempts? If students are not satisfied with their score, they will need to wait until the next exam date. At most, the exams could be administered twice a year – July and December. However, retaking the exam results in the students' delayed entry into university.
6. What will be the formula for the balanced calculation of the high school year-end exams and the university entrance exam, as well as the relative balance of the 10th, 11th, and 12th year-end exams with the MoE component? Work group members preferred a 50/50 balance between the high school calculation and the university entrance exam score. The pending draft law contains verbiage on how the MoE score will be compiled.
7. What type of infrastructure is required within the MoHESR to design and oversee the exam? Members were very interested in the structure and role of the MoE's High Committee; this may or may not serve as a model.

The morning session ended with a consensus on recommending to the full Task Force the proposal for a university entrance exam for a vote.

At the afternoon full session of the Task Force, the above was presented. Additional points included:

- There are national exams at the end of Grade 4 and Grade 9 that similarly serve as gateways; the latter for institutes and vocational schools. Their aim is to direct students who have not displayed interest/talent in academics to take a path directed toward the professions.
- The draft law needs to be further reviewed to assess whether its language supports or obstructs progress toward a university entrance exam. If the latter is the case, it is important to strategize as to how changes/addenda could be introduced.
- If the exam introduces a component focused on the assessment of skills – critical thinking, problem solving, information fluency, etc. – then, this would need to be introduced into the curricula of grades 10, 11, and 12. There would need to be teacher trainings/workshops on this new conceptual basis.
- The implementation of such an exam would need to wait three years after the proposal is accepted. As stated above, it could not be applied to students already in the pipeline – grades 10, 11, and 12 – since their curricula will not match the exam's conceptual framework. It will only impact students in grade 9 and below.

The presentation concluded with the call for a vote from the Task Force members on their acceptance of the proposal for a university entrance exam. The vote passed.

TVET

Dr. Soran presented to the Task Force the status of the TVET initiative in Kurdistan. TVET- Phase 1 is completed; now discussion needs to move onto TVET- Phase 2.

TVET – Phase 1 identified stakeholders and the administrative structure necessary to move forward. While this was initially crafted for Iraq, it can be easily adapted to realities of the KRI and translated into Kurdish. The work group and Task Force can assist in this adaptation. The greatest challenge is the necessity that four ministries need to work together to ensure TVET's success: MoE, MoHESR, Ministry of Planning, and Ministry of Labor & Social Affairs. There would be a national TVET Council with a Board of Directors. The document includes the UNESCO 10 Levels within the

Qualification Framework. Once ready, there should be a national conference to introduce the framework, governance model, and quality assurance mechanisms.

The adaptation and adoption of TVET – Phase 1 will drive other changes within the system. The Qualification Framework will drive the development of new programs and trainings. And in respect to the previous discussion on university admissions, a strong TVET program will change regional perceptions and motivate those high school students without a disposition for a bachelor's degree to seek a more direct path into the workforce. Students could be siphoned off after the grade 9 exam or grade 12 exam. Again, this will only succeed if the public and private sectors work together in order to ensure integrity to these TVET qualifications and introduce guaranteed employment based on successful completion of these programs and licensure.

K-12 Curriculum

Dr. Shelan presented the challenges faced by the MoE regarding the advancement of the curriculum: 1) K-12 has textbooks, but no curriculum, but even these textbooks are not responsive to the fast-changing world, 2) There is no expertise in curriculum building within the MoE, 3) There is a lack of a Learning Vision, and 4) Teachers are inadequately prepared for the demands of a student-centered classroom.

Discussion Points:

- 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.
- The World Bank, UNICEF, Save the Children, and other international NGOs have conducted studies and submitted roadmaps for moving forward (e.g. learning modules, national learning assessment for 4th grade, capacity building for teachers), yet the lack of expertise within the MoE and challenging mindset within the schools, thwart implementation. The MoE continues to look for international donors to help with the development of curricula.
- UNESCO is now completing a needs analysis of secondary school teachers across Iraq; this report will be published in about 2 months.
- Service Delivery Indicators need to be implemented to assess the capacity issues relative to students and teachers.
- A curriculum standard needs to be redesigned to meet KRG 2030 projections for the future job market. This curriculum needs to go beyond disciplinary knowledge and include components on the holistic development of wellness of body and mind, diversity, and respect for multiple perspectives and learning styles.
- Conceptual issue of teaching vs. educating students; ensure competency-based, student-centered culture; the commitment/mentality of teachers; pervasive culture of cynicism; if the MoHESR introduces a university entrance exam, then there will be pressure to move high school teachers forward.
- The Vision 2030 and draft law both contain language on the Vision for Learning; this needs to be distilled into an efficient vision statement for the MoE.

Actions for moving forward include:

- Developing metrics for the measurement of key indicators; this will enable a better system of assessment and monitoring.
- Develop recommendations to address systemic issues.
- Invite experts to assist with the curriculum and teachers' capacity building.
- The MoE invites the participation of members of the Task Force to assist in the above tasks.

Conclusion

It was agreed that the next step would be to organize an online session to review key components of the draft law. The document would be distributed prior to the session so that Task Force members could identify areas of highest concern so that the session would focus on just those points.

Meeting adjourned at 4:20.
