

## Section VI Summary and Recommendations

Palestine is facing an important challenge in the twenty-first century which is to ensure access to quality, relevant and effective higher education for the Palestinian population. This will not be easily achieved without careful planning and coordination between the various institutions and stakeholders of the sector. Being aware of this, the MoEHE has declared the year 2018 as the “Year for Higher Education”. During this year and for the coming years, the Ministry will focus on improving and developing the sector through numerous strategies and policies introduced in the ESDP 2017-2022. Among these are the following three which are the most related to the research for this document:

1. *improving vocational and technical education and higher education by connecting their outputs with the local, regional and international labour market;*
2. *adapting higher education outputs to the needs of the local, regional and international market; and*
3. *regulating the traditional field study majors by: (a) ending licensing any higher education institution that does not offer new programmes responsive to societal needs; and (b) refrain from approving any new programme that doesn't meet societal needs.*

This document was produced to inform the MoEHE's decisions and actions in implementing the above strategies and policies. Specifically, the main objectives of the Consultancy were to develop policy recommendations for higher education programmes in Palestine: (a) through the analysis of higher education policies, (b) identification of obstacles and challenges faced by higher education institutions, (c) exploring the reasons contributing to poor quality of education outcomes and the results of high unemployment rates among graduates, (d) giving recommendations on accreditation of new programmes at higher education institutions or limiting some programmes if needed, and (e) suggesting available opportunities, methods and alternatives to address those challenges by preparing a well-researched policy recommendations document for higher education institution programmes in Palestine.

On the issue of licensing new programmes or limiting current programmes, the Consultant took a direction which is assessing programmes of higher education in terms of their relevance and expected quality for the labour market. Secondary data from the PCBS and the HEMIS were used for this part of the analysis. The results of “Skills Forecasting Model” made available from UNESCO to the Consultant to help her in this particular task. The Consultant also reviewed documents produced by AQAC, to identify its role in the governance of the higher education sector, to oversee the current policies of the universities and higher education institutions regarding their academic programmes and geographic distribution, and to identify the necessary required AQAC tools and powers to ensure the quality and relevance of higher education programmes.

The approach adopted was to diagnosis the higher education sector, review of research on higher education conducted in the past decade, and review official policy documents from the MoEHE dealing with the Laws on Higher Education, the ESDP, the Council for Higher Education, and the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission, in addition to consultation meetings and workshops as well as interviews with key stakeholders.

### ***Main Findings and Challenges***

The diagnosis of higher education revealed that the participation in higher education reached almost 5% of the Palestinian population or 29% of the age group (18-24 years old) posing a challenge for the HEIs to

cater for such a large participation rate. In terms of enrolments, close to a quarter of a million persons (218,415 persons) were enrolled in higher education and the number is continuously on the rise. Female enrolments have reached almost two thirds of all enrolments in higher education and have been higher than those for males in several fields of study and degree programmes.

Females were overwhelmingly enrolled in Education and Teacher Training programmes, in Humanities and Arts, in Natural Science, Mathematics and Statistics, in Health and Health Services, and Social Science and Journalism. Males showed higher enrolments in the other fields of study, such as Engineering, ICT, and Agriculture. Business Administration and Law has almost equal enrolments of females and males (52% to 49%). TVET courses at the Community Colleges and University Colleges were more attracted to males than females. This is a major challenge for the higher education sector: How to attract more males in the system and how to attract females to non-traditional female specialisation – occupations.

Staffing at HEIs indicated that only 21% and 28.4% of all staff are holders of a doctorate degree or a masters' degree, respectively. These ratios are too low in comparison with international standards, while the ratio of Ph.D. holders to Masters' Degree holders in Traditional University reached 1:1 with as low as 25% representation of each amongst the staff. Again, these percentages are very low in comparison with international standards. There is also a low ranking among academic staff for persons ranked as Professors to Assistant Professors, indicating low concentration on research among academic staff members to enable them to "publish or perish". Further, the higher the level of academic ranking and qualifications, the lower the representation of females. Thus, there is a need to increase the number of academic staff in general, those with Ph.D. in particular, and those involved in research and publications for the creation of knowledge and the improvement of teaching quality.

The student-to-academic staff ratio was very high (30:1) at HEIs in Palestine. It was below the average at high ranking institutions (14:1 in the USA, and 16:1 in most European Universities). This implies heavy loads for academic staff in terms of teaching, corrections of examinations and reports and decreasing attention to the face-to-face interaction with students. This also limits the time allocated for supervision of postgraduate students. Competition that the HEIs face with other parts of the labour market outside education is the reason behind the drying out of Ph.D. and higher degree holders from HEIs.

Financially, most HEIs depend very much on tuition and student fees to run their teaching services, amounting to almost 68% of current expenditures in these institutions, and over 86% of all incomes to the institutions. Higher education is extraordinarily expensive, but only \$1000 are allocated per student in Palestine. A major challenge is the increase in the number of enrolled students by more than five times over the years while the number of staff has remained almost the same. The second challenge is the rapid increase in the number of students at the time when financial and other resources are being limited or even almost fixed over time.

The full suites of the broad fields of education is available at the HEIs in Palestine, with only 2-3 specific specialisations that are not included among the offerings. There are at least 700 fine specialisations in 1155 types of programmes on offer at HEIs at all levels of higher degrees – from Intermediate or Associate Diploma level to the Doctorate level. The largest number of programmes are offered in Education and Teacher Training field (189 programmes), in Business Administration and Law (185 programmes), in ICT (82 programmes), and in Engineering and Engineering Professions (130 programmes). There are however duplications, triplications and multiplications of these programmes not only within Palestine as a whole but also within one geographical area (West Bank and Gaza). The large number of programmes within one field of study leads to high unemployment among graduates of these programmes.

The Educational Qualification degree is offered widely in Palestine, however, there is clear overlapping of these programmes among universities in both the West Bank and Gaza, with the qualification being offered as a stand-alone without a pre-requisite of specialisation in a disciplinary area. Field supervision of students enrolling in this qualification should be scrutinize especially when offered by the Open University. Again, lack of appropriate supervisors for the large number of Masters' Degree enrolments puts in question the quality of these programmes and at the same time confirms that these are only course work degrees.

Programmes offered at the Bachelor Degree pose numerous challenges in terms:

- (a) of repetition and duplication of specialisations in one geographical area and in Palestine as a whole,
- (b) the large number of specialisations in one Faculty and in the system as a whole,
- (c) the large enrolments of specialisations at certain institutions,
- (d) the small enrolments in numerous programmes which make them not viable,
- (e) the large number of enrolments in fields of education which suffer from high unemployment among their graduates as well as longer waiting period before settling in employment, and most importantly
- (f) the mismatch between the labour market demands and the skills produced in these programmes.

Such challenges pose several policy questions: how to limit the number of specialisation in a faculty to enable concentration on 5-6 specialisations within one particular institution, how to eliminate or temporarily terminate enrolments in programmes with low enrolments, how to reduce enrolments in large programmes, and how to limit the overall number of current specialisations in one field in order to leave room for other specialisations to be offered and to limit the duplications in all fields.

Programmes offered at the Intermediate or Associate Diploma level are in a better shape than those at the Bachelor Degree. Still, the programmes suffer from low enrolments in general and of low female enrolments in particular. The challenge for these programmes is how to attract more students to specific specialisations with small enrolments, or to attract more students to those specialisations already in existence but with low enrolments, or how to change the culture among future students to be attracted to this type of education and training rather than going for the Bachelor Degree.

There are several key issues raised throughout the document, on the employment and unemployment of graduates, on the job vacancies and skills requirements of the labour market in comparison with those produced or will be produced by the HEIs, on the governance and management of HEIs at the institutional level and/by the governmental instrumentalities such as the CHE, AQAC and the MoEHE. These include but not limited to: (a) the limited funding for teaching, learning and research; (b) the selection processes for HEIs leaders, (c) the quality assurance system is underdeveloped; and (d) the insufficient relevant research.

## ***Recommendations***

Given the summary and challenges provided above, together with the quantitative and qualitative analysis provided throughout the document, the following recommendations are put forward.

### **Recommendations on enrolments, staffing, and finance**

It is recommended that the MoEHE, the HEIs, the CHE, and AQAC cooperate on the following tasks:

- Employ a process to improve the quality of academic staff – especially those with higher education qualifications,

- Employ a process to increase academic staff with Ph.D. training, & increase ratio of Ph.D.: Masters' degree holders
- Provide both technical and financial support for field of studies and disciplines required in the local market at the expense of others no longer required.

### **Recommendations on programmes of study**

It is recommended that the MoEHE, the HEIs, the CHE, and AQAC cooperate on the following tasks:

- Encourage institutions to focus and specialised in small numbers of field of studies depending on their own strength areas.
- Employ a process of rationing of programmes with low enrolments, duplication in one region, and/or triplication in Palestine.
- Employ a process of rationing of programmes with high rates of unemployment – not in line with the needs of the labour market.
- Employ a process of rationing and integration of study programmes and disciplines in all HEIs to achieve equality between WB&G, but also within Palestine; to achieve integration and coordination between institutions both vertically and horizontally

### **Recommendations on research**

It is recommended that the MoEHE:

- Establish a real culture of research within HEIs, especially universities - knowledge creation and knowledge building in all fields of education.
- Define a national research agenda; (b) establishing a national research fund; (c) evaluating research proposals on competitive basis using publicly announced criteria and a panel of university peers; (d) running training workshops on research methods and proposal writing; (e) defining and applying standards of acceptable quality of Masters and Ph.D. dissertations; (f) establishing quality criteria for university research publications (e.g., peer review of publications)

### **Recommendations on governance and management (AQAC)**

- Re-establish a well-functioning quality assurance system with well-defined standards and criteria as well as processes - rather than just a licensing and accreditation tasks currently performed by AQAC; and re-establish AQAC as an independent, technically competent quality assurance agency outside the MoEHE structure as a para-state entity;
- Re-define the standards for licensing and accreditation based on set criteria rather than instructional and guidelines.
- AQAC and the HEIs seek technical advice from the Arab Quality Assurance Network for Higher Education and International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education;
- ensuring that AQAC staff are knowledgeable regarding university academic procedures;
- continuous training of staff on university quality assurance processes and practices, including through sending staff for training to more mature quality assurance agencies in other countries;

- ensure that all HEIs and programmes are accredited, and
- make the accreditation results public.

### **Recommendations on governance and management (Institutional Level)**

For HEIs, it is recommended that

- the process for selecting HEIs leaders should be improved through a change in the relevant law so that (a) setting up a university nominating committee for the selection process; (b) a public call for nominations is issued; (c) a competitive, merit-based evaluation of candidates is employed; and (d) the highest evaluated candidate is appointed.
- the quality of academic staff should be improved through; (a) raising the academic qualifications of staff through postgraduate education in reputable HEIs; (b) raise quality of academic and administrative staff by appropriate training and capacity building including improvement of fluency in international languages; (c) raising the quality of academic and administrative staff by merit-based recruitment; (d) improving the morale, motivation and performance by increasing opportunities for participation in international conferences and similar academic networking activities; (e) attracting high quality academics from outside Palestine (expatriates) to return to the HEIs; (f) revising the university staff service law/regulations; (g) revising the job description for academic and administrative staff.
- the MoEHE and the institutions should work together to progressively increase the funding of teaching and research to international norms through (a) progressively raise budget share for teaching-learning materials to about 20% of the total university recurrent budget; (b) progressively raise budget share for research to about 5% of the total university recurrent budget; (c) increasing the institutions' income-generating activities and the use revenues for teaching and research expenses; (d) establishing regional equipment maintenance training centres and improving the capacity of technicians to maintain equipment and facilities.

It is recommended, if not already available, that the new higher education law should: (a) ensure greater institutional autonomy and ensure that accountability mechanism is in place to safeguard this delegation of authority; (b) provide for the emergence of different types of support agencies for the higher education system, such as buffer bodies, quality assurance agencies, student loan programmes, and research foundations; and (c) address the need to change the way that higher education is financed, as public enrolments grow to the point where public funding is no longer sufficient to guarantee quality education.