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Higher Education in the Gulf States: Present & Future

Featuring

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United Arab Emirates

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Foreword by
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Foreword

by Shaikha Dana Nasser Al-Sabah

The privatization of post-secondary education in Kuwait is now in its 16th year. Since 2001, Kuwait has granted licenses to 16 universities and colleges, of which nine are currently operating. Among them is the American University of Kuwait (AUK), which was established in 2003, and opened its doors in 2004 as Kuwait's first and only liberal arts university. Over the years, it has been tremendously gratifying to watch our graduates thrive as productive individuals and citizens of both the region and broader world; it has also been gratifying to see the impact they have made in creating and promoting social and economic progress. At AUK, the focus has always been on graduating life-long learners rather than professional drones. That's because we see education as inherently valuable, regardless of the fact that it is critical for developing human capital and creating knowledge-based economies.

Whether public or private, education should not be simply judged within the context of how well it disseminates knowledge and teaches specific skillsets that are aligned to the market. Instead, we as a society must begin to think about education within a broader holistic context, seriously taking into consideration our national approach to education. This will require thinking beyond metrics such as the number of schools, universities, majors and degrees available. It will also require a consideration of the following: what is our national approach to education?; is it identifiable and definable?; to what extent are our educational institutes aligning themselves in support of the national agenda?; how do we measure all of this? and do we have a mechanism in place to improve education?

At the moment, the demand for a globally-nuanced citizenry that is well-informed, has transferable skills, is flexible to adapt to ever-evolving market needs, can think critically and can work with local, regional and international communities is at an all-time high. While we are focusing on developing Kuwait's academic and pedagogical infrastructure for higher education, a key concern raised by university administrators and instructors is adequately preparing students for post-secondary education.

As the public begins to grasp the substantial benefits of higher education, the imperative now is to look more closely at the state of public and private K-12 education and how it can be improved. The lack of academic readiness of students who enroll in post-secondary institutions is of great concern (it is a problem that is not unique to Kuwait nor the Gulf region in general, and is worldwide in nature). Issues like quantitative illiteracy should not only be addressed early on in primary school, but also in the years immediately leading up to higher education.

As for the labor market, skills-based education is abundant in Kuwait but insufficient for where we are as a society and where we need to be. Although our job market openly demands skills-based education, the real challenge is about work values and ethics and how to instill them in our youth. This is the only way toward social advancement.

What a liberal education can do—at least in the post-secondary sector—is provide the framework for much-needed change. This type of education is tried-and-tested in Europe and the United States; it is not alien to the Gulf. Furthermore, there is a clear value-add to providing opportunities for young people to

become “well-rounded.” Not only will it expand their pool of knowledge—through a general education curriculum that informs all majors and degrees—but it can foster a culture of curiosity and knowledge-seeking. The act of raising and researching questions does not just provide us with answers, but opens up new avenues of inquiry and further research. Indeed, these are the intellectual principles that define progress, may it be social or otherwise.

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Higher Education in the Gulf States: Present and Future Overview

by Ahmed Baghdady, Theme Editor

Like health and social services, education in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region has undergone major developments over the past two decades. Revenues from oil and gas exports have enabled Gulf states to invest in both K-12 and higher education, as well as to improve the access to and quality of education on offer. Although this happened to varying degrees among the Gulf states—often depending on how wealthy each state is—there are a number of features common to all. The move toward quality and diversity in higher education provision, the establishment of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs and institutions and newfound support for research and innovation are prominent features of these improvement efforts.

While the financial crisis in 2008 and the sharp drop in oil prices that began in 2014 have hampered investment in several sectors, higher education has been minimally affected. Financial support for public universities, scholarship programs and international branch campuses (IBCs) have continued despite shrinking state budgets across the region.

The motives behind these reform efforts are twofold. First, GCC governments have realized that a carbon-based economy is unsustainable, particularly at a time of instability across the Middle East. The need to move toward a knowledge-based economy is understood to be critical, and can only be achieved by developing a well-educated population that can contribute effectively to the economy. Second, the globalization of higher education, advancements in knowledge transfers and increased mobility of scholars, students, programs and education providers across national borders has led to a re-envisioning of higher education in the Gulf. As such, there has been a tremendous increase in the number and diversity of institutions and programs available, the attention paid to accreditation and quality assurance and the partnerships between local and international universities.

That said, the outcome of higher education reform efforts have not yet met expectations. This is due to several factors including the lack of quality K-12 education that adequately prepares students for higher education, the societal resistance to some aspects of higher education internationalization and the lack of student motivation. Although some improvement efforts have yielded positive results—such as the establishment of private universities and IBCs—other initiatives have not been as successful.

The future of higher education in the Gulf is somewhat uncertain given the political and economic issues affecting the region. Key questions remain unanswered: (1) will higher education be affected if oil prices continue to drop in the next few years?; (2) are IBCs sustainable and can they survive without financial support from host governments?; (3) if real estate and infrastructure projects are put on hold, will the labor market need change?; (4) if instability takes hold in one or more Gulf states, how will this affect higher education? and (5) will more students enroll in TVET programs to meet the labor market's needs?

But however successful higher education reform in the Gulf is over the next decade or more, it is clear

that education will remain a core focus area of Gulf states. Although higher education improvement is led primarily by governments, societies will continue to play a major role in shaping the future of education in the Gulf. Also, the internationalization of higher education is expected to continue to impact local education systems and could prompt new advances in higher education. Leaders and policymakers must be prepared to deal with more pressures from their societies, changing labor market needs, scarcer financial resources, new requirements in adapting with the internationalization of education, and higher expectations from students.

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II. Analysis



Saudi students attend a class at the Technology College in Riyadh on 30 October 2010.

Are Vocational and Applied Training the Same Thing in a GCC Context? *by Annamarie Lawrence*

Any new expatriate to the Gulf will sooner or later hear about the apparent “skills gap” among nationals. This gap has been the subject of many regional studies and forms the basis of a number of government policies. With many jobs being filled by expatriate labor instead of nationals, there are concerns about the long-term sustainability of the labor market model in the region.

In Bahrain, this skills gap was confirmed in 2010 by an extensive nationwide study.¹ General math, English-language and problem-solving skills were shown to be lacking among nationals. The education, healthcare, insurance, hospitality and manufacturing industries were some of the sectors specifically identified as suffering from skills shortages. For this reason, a number of reforms and initiatives were set up including the national agency Tamkeen, which is responsible for up-skilling Bahrainis through an elaborate training scheme.

Understanding vocational training

Vocational training tends to be understood as a career-focused education that one might traditionally find in a technical college or polytechnic.² While there are examples of the traditional apprenticeship model

in some fields such as pearl diving and engineering, we don't see Gulf nationals in the same breadth of trades common in vocational institutes in Western countries. In Europe, for example, vocational training generally includes trades as diverse as hairdressing, carpentry and plumbing.³ But it is apparent from government documents that no one is proposing these same trades be included in vocational education in the Gulf states.

What then do we mean by vocational training? Gulf governments talk about “work-ready graduates,” “21st century skills” and a closer alignment between higher education and the labor market. In fact, this is at the core of Bahrain's National Higher Education Strategy, the UAE's National Agenda and National Innovation Strategy and Qatar's National Education Strategy 2011-2016. But if “vocational” means ensuring graduates learn skills that are more closely-aligned with the job market, then governments should be looking at taking a specific policy approach focused on industry integration, applied learning and industry-led teaching. Borrowing policies and models designed within a Western context of vocational training might not be relevant to the Gulf.⁴

In the case of Bahrain's National Higher Education Strategy, there is little mention of vocational training. But it's apparent that the policy approach has been interpreted as embedding applied “21st century skills.” That's what the Skills for the Future program is modelled on, and it's one of six strategic areas of focus in the National Higher Education Strategy.

In 2014, the Higher Education Council initiated a detailed study to build upon the previous 2010 skills gap analysis and identify from employers what specific skills they felt were needed in their industries. The findings were presented in 2015 at a well-attended national industry and education forum, and all higher education intuitions were given a copy of the results.⁵ Since then, closer alignment between higher education and industry has been included by the Bahrain Authority for Quality and Training (BQA) as a measurement indicator. Modelled on international standards, BQA is responsible for quality assurance across Bahrain's higher education sector. Institutes are now required to justify all new course development decisions based on labor market needs—in particular the skills requirements outlined by the Higher Education Council's research.

Mode 2 knowledge and Bahrain Polytechnic

There is a theoretical basis for this needs-based approach. The 1994 book, *The New Production of Knowledge*, by Gibbons and his colleagues refers to “Mode 2” knowledge production, arguing that modern societies need a different type of expertise than what's traditionally taught in higher education institutes. Mode 2 knowledge is defined as knowledge that is developed in context of its application, is problem-solving oriented and provides immediate benefit to industry.⁶ It differs from traditional academic research, which is based on scientific exploration and a discipline-specific focus (called Mode 1 knowledge).

One of the key Mode 2-type initiatives in Bahrain was the establishment of Bahrain Polytechnic in 2008. Bahrain Polytechnic's institutional research indicated that diploma-level qualifications—normally associated with the trades—were viewed unfavorably by Bahraini parents, prospective students and industry. In turn, Bahrain Polytechnic embedded the vocational approach into its degree programs by ensuring work-integrated learning occurred at every level. So-called “employability skills” were embedded into all programs, in particular critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and IT skills. As most instructors had an industry background, programs were naturally more closely-aligned to industry practices. Instructors at the Polytechnic use a Problem-Based Learning pedagogical methodology, which has been

II. Analysis

Borrowing policies and models designed within a Western context of vocational training might not be relevant to the Gulf.

proven to enhance critical thinking among students.⁷ Industry case studies are also developed by teaching staff—often in partnership with industry—and then used as a teaching tool. Students take a diagnostic

approach, and then put a theoretical framework around their proposed solutions.

One example is the final semester-long industry project. Students act as consultants and are expected to solve a problem that would add value to industry. Following a professional project management methodology, students undertake an agreed upon problem and deliver a specific pre-agreed output. Industry partners that hosted these students have said they added significant value to their organizations.⁸ In addition, they benefited from the expertise of industry-experienced teaching staff who at the time were supervising participating students.

In the first semester, sourcing projects was a challenge. While many industry partners were experienced in offering traditional-style internships to students, the project approach was unprecedented at the time in Bahrain. This took lengthy engagement with industry—either by teaching or industry liaison staff—in order to get them on board. It took close collaboration between teaching staff and industry to ensure the project approach was consistent and the students were able to meet the agreed upon deliverables. With seven batches of students having now completed their industry project, sourcing the projects has become a lot easier. The good reputation of the Polytechnic and the industry project program means that demand for students now outweighs the number of spots available.

It's apparent that the “Bahraini” model of vocational education found at Bahrain Polytechnic has been a success. The quality of Bahrain Polytechnic graduates has received significant acclaim from many industry leaders, the minister of education and international education experts. Compared to the national average, research has also demonstrated a high rate of employment for fresh graduates.⁹ This success highlights the value of Mode 2 knowledge production in the Gulf context.

Lessons learned

One of the key factors underpinning the Polytechnic's success is that it was created in response to specific labor market needs and done in consultation with employers. This deliberate alignment has provided a model for vocational education in Bahrain, and how higher education and industry can work together to further national economic development. The lessons learned from the Bahrain Polytechnic model can apply to the wider Gulf region.

So whether it's called “applied learning,” “Mode 2 knowledge production,” “professional education” or “vocational training,” it's clear that there is a lot to be gained when knowledge producers and users work together to make sure the needs of both students and the labor market are met.

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Students at the Abu Dhabi Women's College, UAE, 2004.

More Educated, Less Employed: The Paradox of Women's Employment in the Gulf

by Karen E. Young

There is a paradox in women's achievement across the Gulf states. By most international standards, female citizens of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have good access to education systems, affordable and proficient health care and social services. Women are graduating from university in higher numbers than men, maternal health risks are low and childcare and family support services are plentiful. However, women in the Gulf remain marginalized and, in some sectors, nearly invisible from the workforce. In particular, women are most absent from economic life in the private sector.

The women's employment paradox in the Gulf states means that there is an abundance of wealth in human capital that is not being utilized to its full potential. Those young women who hold higher education or other advanced degrees are more likely to be unemployed. In Saudi Arabia, as much as 80 percent of female job-seekers hold university degrees. While Gulf governments may be eager to prioritize the hiring of nationals—especially in the private sector—cultural and structural barriers continue to hinder women's economic inclusion. The variation in women's employment across the Gulf states—particularly among nationals—begs the question of how policy changes may create new opportunities and incentive structures for women.

The employment lag

Across the GCC region, employment opportunity trails behind educational achievement—with some important case variation.¹ Kuwait has been successful in achieving more equal participation of women in the workforce, along with high rates of educational attainment. Women make up more than 65 percent of university degree holders in Kuwait.² According to a 2014 survey by the Public Authority for Civil Information, Kuwaiti women constitute close to half of employed citizens, or 197,836 out of a total workforce of 422,325. About half of public sector employees are Kuwaiti women as well—or at least 160,087 of 336,977 state employees as of June 2016.³

Yet beyond Kuwait, women are highly underrepresented in the region's workforce. The disparity in educational attainment and economic participation is most striking in Saudi Arabia, perhaps unsurprisingly, where women's opportunity to engage fully in the workforce faces many institutional and social barriers. Indeed, women in Saudi Arabia make up just over six percent of the workforce. In Qatar, 54 percent of university-age women enroll in higher education compared to only 28 percent of men. Qatari women have some of the highest female literacy rates in the region, at 98.3 percent.⁴ Yet Qatari women are the second-least visible in terms of their participation in the private sector workforce. In the UAE, 41 percent of university-age women are enrolled in higher education compared to only 22 percent of men. But only 42 percent of working-age women compared to 92 percent of men are employed or actively looking for work.⁵ At 52 percent, the global employment average is not much better, but the 97 percent female literacy rate in the UAE is much higher than the global literacy average of 84 percent.⁶

The most women-friendly economies in the Gulf also tend to have the most active legislative systems and representative institutions.

National vs non-national women

The picture is somewhat complicated by the large number of expatriate workers in the Gulf states. Non-national women are proportionally more present across the GCC—nearly two to one—in the labor force than national women.⁷ This suggests that being a woman is not a wholesale barrier to employment, but rather being a national is. For national women, social and religious norms about employment outside the home—and in mixed-gender environments—are changing. But these customs continue to pose barriers to women's participation in the economy.⁸

Bahrain and Kuwait are the GCC states with the highest labor participation rates of national and non-national women. It is generally easier to be a working woman, regardless of nationality, in both of these countries. In Qatar and the UAE, the two Gulf states with the highest ratio of expatriate workers (who are predominately male) to citizens, there are lower rates of female labor force participation.

In some cases, we see large numbers of non-national women also absent from the workforce. These are the trailing spouses of the expatriate community. In the UAE, data from the Gulf Labour Market and Migration project revealed a total population of 1.3 million women in 2005.⁹ Non-national women in the UAE working and registered in the private sector numbered 114,717 in 2005, out of a total non-national private sector workforce of over 2.2 million people.¹⁰

Resource wealth alone does not seem to be a deterrent to women's employment. Bahrain and Kuwait are highly dependent on oil revenue as a source of government outlays, but women tend to be more present in

II. Analysis

the workforce in both countries. Not coincidentally, they are also able to access and engage with legislative institutions. Whereas in other states where resource wealth has been more abundant (as measured in per capita income), there are more mixed results. Heavily resource-dependent states with declining resource wealth might be creating economic incentives for women to work. This suggests that the most important factor is indeed political liberalization. The most women-friendly economies in the Gulf also tend to have the most active legislative systems and representative institutions.

Women and the private sector

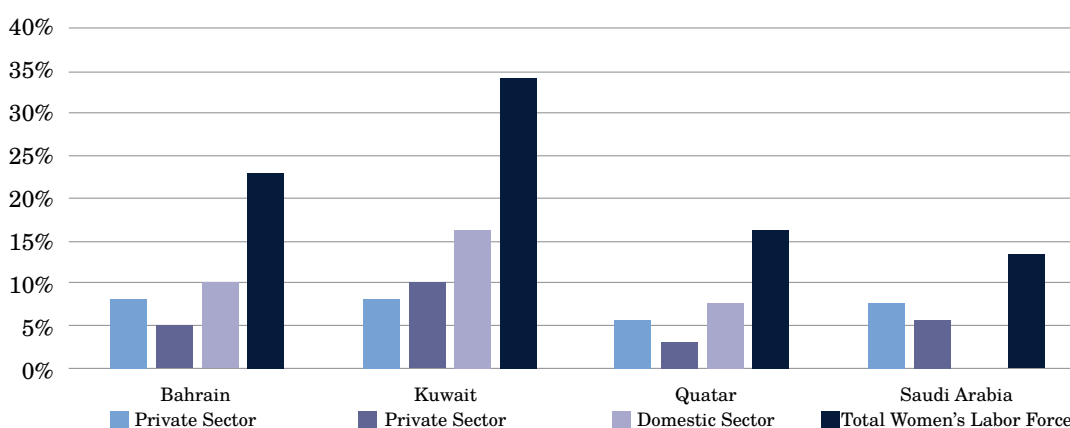
Of the places in which national women have found employment, they are over-represented as a whole among government employees (see Figure 1). A large amount of women's work is neither officially public nor private, and takes place in the home. The domestic service sector is almost entirely filled by non-national females, which can account for larger numbers of working women (where they are tabulated this way). These jobs reinforce norms about what work is and isn't appropriate for women.

Likewise, the high rates of national women employed in the public rather than the private sector has cultural and social implications. National women might be discouraged to join private sector workplaces dominated by both men and non-national women. The invisibility of national women in private sector workplaces means that women are less likely to find mentors and role models for their own career trajectories, adding further obstacles for them to break through as female employees. Between 2011 and 2012, as part of a grant from the Middle East Partnership Initiative of the US State Department, a women's networking program in the UAE geared toward matching young graduates with women in public policy and legal careers demonstrated how mentoring programs help break down barriers and ease introductions.¹¹ Yet there are simply less women in senior roles to meet the mentoring needs of a growing population of working Emirati women.

Future trends

Recent reports on the future of work and the use of technology to help people—particularly women—work from home, in part-time capacities or more informal settings could have some benefit in shifting cultural attitudes toward women in the workplace.¹² Structural issues, such as the *kafala* system and the consistent pay and benefits differentials between private and public sector employment, remain obstacles for national women to join the private sector. Legal barriers to women's financial and physical mobility also vary considerably throughout the Gulf, and can pose significant barriers to employment for women in some countries.¹³

Figure 1: Women's Labor Force by Country and Sector¹⁴



Yet despite these obstacles, women are poised to play a significant role in the next phase of Gulf economic development. They are now more than ever needed as a source of labor, and have become an explicit part of government diversification efforts in an era of declining oil and gas revenues. Even in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Vision 2030 has stipulated increasing women's employment as an important development goal, particularly in the private sector. But the challenge will be the same as it has been for the last decade: ensuring women transition from educational attainment to successful careers in the workforce.

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 - ¹¹ Program was led by the author.
 - ¹² Overdahl, Stian. "It's Time to Face the Future." *Bloomberg Businessweek*. May 16-31, 2016.
 - ¹³ Aldosari, Hala. "The Personal is Political: Gender Identity in the Personal Status Laws of the Gulf Arab States." The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, Washington, 2016.
 - ¹⁴ The data was based on each country's most recent figures and includes all women (nationals and non-nationals). There was not enough data on Oman and the UAE to include them in the graph. Nor were there any figures on women's labor participation in the domestic sector in Saudi Arabia.
Source: Gulf Labor Markets and Migration: Bahrain; "Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) -- Bahrain," Kuwait; Public Authority for Civil Information," Qatar; "Labour Force Sample Surveys, 2006 to 2009 and 2011 to 2013; Census 2010 (Qatar)," Saudi Arabia; "Labour Force Surveys."



Saudi student studying at the Catholic University of America library in Washington, D.C., on 27 October 2006.

Reshaping Higher Education in the Gulf States: Study Abroad Trends and Student Experiences *by Samar A. Abid Al Tamimi*

The challenges imposed by internationalization and globalization trends in higher education—in particular that of escalating competitiveness—is forcing higher education institutions worldwide to look for models to follow.¹ A common response is the adoption, and in some cases the local adaptation, of the Western research university model that has its roots in the UK and is employed in Australia and in European countries.²

In the Gulf states, efforts to reform and modernize higher education to create knowledge-based societies are ongoing.³ Member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) share a regional vision to make the Arab Gulf a hub for world-class education.⁴ Arab higher education systems that were long characterized by mass production of graduates and incremental support from the state are now shifting to new Western models of higher education. Several factors, including the development of the knowledge economy, massive access to higher education and increasing higher education differentiation are contributing to this push.⁵

To achieve this vision, the Gulf states have adopted the Western research university model by hosting international branch campuses (IBCs) in the region.⁶ GCC governments have also embraced study abroad scholarship programs that sponsor large numbers of Gulf nationals to study in Western universities. Ac-

According to *Open Doors*, an annual report that is produced by the Institute of International Education (IIE), Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are now ranked as two of the top 25 countries of origin for international students studying in the US.

In numbers: study abroad programs

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Foreign Scholarship Program (formerly King Abdullah Scholarship Program) is the most ambitious government-sponsored study abroad project in the Gulf. Since its launch in 2004, it has facilitated educating thousands of young Saudi university students—including women—to study in the US. The program's goal is to improve Saudi Arabia's relations with the West and the US in particular, and to produce more highly-trained nationals to better meet the needs of the Saudi labor market. The program gained momentum in 2007, with about 8,000 Saudi students participating at that time. The number of Saudi students enrolled in American universities has since grown exponentially. In 2015, Saudis were the third largest group of international students studying in the US,⁷ contributing about \$2.06 billion to the domestic economy.⁸ The majority of these students pursued undergraduate degrees in the STEM fields (21.6% of Saudi students studying in the US were enrolled in graduate programs).⁹

Saudi enrollment in higher education institutions in the UK has also skyrocketed in recent years. According to the UK Council of International Student Affairs,¹⁰ 9,065 Saudi nationals studied in UK higher education institutions in 2013. Three-thousand of those students pursued post-graduate research in the UK, and 2,750 of them were women. In total, 57,303 male and 17,902 female students are currently on the scholarship program. Last year, 10,491 male and female students together were nominated to join the scholarship program.¹¹

The UAE and Bahrain's different approaches to higher education reform explains the comparatively low number of their nationals studying abroad.

Like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait also has a robust study abroad program. With 9,772 students in the US, Kuwait is ranked the 16th country of origin for international students in the US.¹² Most of these students are sponsored to graduate with undergraduate STEM-related degrees. Last year, Kuwaiti students contributed \$308 million to the US economy.

No other Gulf state scores in the top 25 countries of origin for international students in the US. But other Gulf states are ramping up the number of students they sponsor to study in Western universities. For instance, Oman and Qatar have followed Saudi Arabia and Kuwait's lead by sending more students to study abroad throughout the last decade. Currently, 2,856 Omanis and 1,443 Qataris are studying in the US.¹³

Perceptions, attitudes and experiences

Two large-scale surveys by Hobsons and IIE asked international students about their experiences in, and perspectives of, Western higher education institutions. Hobsons surveyed international students from 198 countries—including those from Saudi Arabia—studying in the UK and Australia. The report highlighted that, generally, students select an academic program before choosing the country and institution at which they wish to enroll.¹⁴ For those students, teaching quality and the ranking of the academic course were the most important elements affecting their decision to study at an overseas institution.

The IIE survey specifically examined the perceptions and attitudes of Saudi students toward American and Western higher education.¹⁵ Saudi students viewed the model of the Western research university as

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holistic and educationally enlightening. They saw high value in characteristics of Western higher education such as gaining preparation to be professional leaders, achieving a graduate degree, the integration of research into higher education, improving research skills, publishing research studies and studying to succeed economically. This view was framed in terms of developing independent learning, gaining preparation to become more autonomous, conducting multidisciplinary work, acquiring knowledge to be more competitive and creating new knowledge. In addition, Gulf students enjoyed Western universities for the good support, student services and lifestyle that they provide. Language barriers and the lengthy application and visa processes were viewed as the main obstacles deterring students from attending universities in Western countries.¹⁶

In both surveys, participating students viewed high academic value and graduation outcomes as the most beneficial aspects of their education abroad. Aligning academic training with students' expectations signified future success and the accomplishment of national and personal goals.¹⁷

The outliers: Bahrain and the UAE

Of the six Gulf states, Bahrain and the UAE have taken a somewhat different approach to internationalization and educational reform. Since its independence in 1971, Bahrain has invested in modernizing its educational system and infrastructure with the help of international organizations such as the World Bank.¹⁸ The result is that Bahrain has the highest level of educated nationals in the Gulf, and they make up the majority of the Bahraini labor market.¹⁹ In contrast, the UAE's approach has been to transform the country into an international hub for world-class education. The Dubai Academic City, which was established in 2006 and hosted a combination of local and international institutions, exemplifies this approach.¹⁹ The UAE has focused mainly on importing IBCs rather than sponsoring students to be educated abroad. (It's worth noting that Qatar has taken a mixed approach. Top international universities operate on its soil, and the government sends a considerable number of its nationals to study abroad).

The UAE and Bahrain's different approaches to higher education reform explains the comparatively low number of their nationals studying abroad. In 2015, there were only 2,920 Emirati and 469 Bahraini students in the US.²⁰

Looking forward

Despite economic downturns and declining oil prices, more Gulf students than ever before are projected to pursue some sort of education in Western universities. Given the attempts to either adopt or adapt to the Western research university as a model for strengthening higher education systems, it is imperative that we understand the perceptions and experiences of Gulf students educated or influenced by Western higher education. This could be of great value for Gulf policymakers and administrators at both Western universities and IBCs.

But Gulf policymakers must also consider the drawbacks. Adopting outcome-based education and internationalized education policy may reduce the state's control over national education and economic policy choices. Policy borrowing from the global center inextricably links the Gulf to the educational systems of Western countries. This kind of partnership risks making the Arab Gulf dependent on policies and strategies foreign to the region—all for the sake of achieving international competitiveness status.

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A man holds a sign as he participates in a rally commemorating Labour Day in Manama, Bahrain on 1 May 2013.

The Mismatch Between Higher Education and Labor Market Needs: A Bahrain Case Study by Hanin Bukamal & Cameron Mirza

Since the 2008 launch of the Bahrain 2030 Economic Vision, which outlined plans to make Bahrain's economy more sustainable, competitive and fair, there have been continuous efforts to ensure that Bahraini graduates are more employable in a 21st century labor market.¹ In particular, for graduates to have both the relevant technical knowledge and soft skills and attitudes that employers so often require.

The Higher Education Council, which launched the National Strategy for Higher Education (2014-2024), seeks to address the mismatch between higher education and the labor market. The strategy's main objectives are to facilitate problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and networking skills—attributes that are needed for success in today's world of work. As per the Skills for the Future theme, the National Strategy has identified five priority areas: (1) effective employer engagement with the higher education sector; (2) the alignment of graduate skills with professional skills required by industry; (3) the alignment of programs and courses with future national reform needs and growth sectors; (4) career guidance that is integrated across the higher education sector and (5) workforce readiness through integrating 21st century skills across all disciplines.²

But despite the National Strategy's clear goals, it's unclear how higher education institutions are expected to comply with this strategy. It's also unclear whether institutions are being monitored by the Higher Ed-

ucation Council to adopt its values. This could be a major cause of the slow results relating to employment that is generated by higher education institutions in Bahrain.

Employer concerns

Efforts to reform the educational system in Bahrain have not been fast enough to cope with changes in the industry and the changing needs of employers. Youth unemployment rates are expected to rise in most Gulf states, and Bahrain is no exception. Youth unemployment is projected to increase from 29 percent in 2014 to 31 percent in 2018.³

The main challenges to hiring and retaining young Bahraini nationals is their high salary expectations, lack of work experience, communication skills and professional discipline.

According to a 2015 Ernst & Young report, the main challenges to hiring and retaining young Bahraini nationals is their high salary expectations, lack of work experience, communication skills and professional discipline. Although overall unemployment is high in Bahrain—which can indicate general economic sluggishness and job creation issues—the even higher youth unemployment rate suggests that graduates lack the skills required to enter the job market.

The 2015 Ernst & Young report notes that employers stated that the top reasons for hiring young nationals were their skills and qualifications, local knowledge and connections, commitment and professionalism.⁴ However, the least common reasons were communication and problem-solving skills. That's a region-wide trend, and one which should serve as a reminder and potential focus of higher education providers.

Other studies indicate similar findings. A 2015 Higher Education Council presentation shared survey results revealing that only 19 percent of employers said that the education system prepares students with the right attitudes and behaviors. Worse still, only 16 percent of employers said that the education system equips them with the core skills required in their industry. Sixteen percent also said that the curricula is in line with the private sector's needs.⁵ To address these shortcomings, employers are increasingly being encouraged to play a bigger role in designing university curricula and working alongside educators to make it more relevant to industry.

The case of Bahrain Polytechnic

Bahrain Polytechnic, which was established by the Bahraini government in 2008, aims to ensure graduates meet the labor market's needs and supply the domestic economy with a source of highly-skilled workers.⁶ The Polytechnic works in consultation with industry and has embedded eight skills across their curricula: (1) communication, (2) teamwork, (3) problem-solving, (4) initiative and enterprise, (5) planning and organization, (6) self-management, (7) life-long learning and (8) technology. The results have been a resounding success: 85 percent of recent graduates are now in paid employment.⁷

It's comforting to see the achievements of Bahrain Polytechnic, and that Bahrain is a leader among Gulf states in several domains: (1) highest rate of students who believe that their education is equipping them with the right training and skills for their chosen career; (2) second-place for students who have sufficient access to information about jobs and career paths; (3) second-place for students who know what qualifications they need to work on for their preferred industry; (4) second-place for students who feel they understand the job application process in their preferred industry and (5) highest percentage of students who prefer to work in the private sector.⁸

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But there is still a large margin for improvement. In order to tackle the issue of employability, the solutions will need to be both practical and sensible to the Bahraini context. Talent development should be a major focus for all higher education institutions and employers in the country. In fact, the recently published 2016 University of Bahrain Transformation Plan is a good example, mainly because it has a clear focus on developing talented future workers by emphasizing increased technology use, new programs that are focused on emerging economic areas and forging better ties to industry.⁹ There is currently a glaring gap between industry, teaching and research, and more collaboration between these three domains is necessary to lower the high unemployment rates in Bahrain and the wider MENA region. Graduates will also need to be skilled enough to cope with increasingly volatile and precarious work environments, in addition to being able to add more value to their current employers.

Practical solutions

One of many solutions is to make internships a mandatory part of all undergraduate degrees, as they can help bridge the gap between education and work. Only 34 percent of employers currently offer internships to students. While that percentage is slightly higher than the Gulf average of 27 percent,¹⁰ it could be vastly improved. What's more, these statistics show that the responsibility of high youth unemployment lies both with the higher education institutions and the employers who need to be more hands-on in welcoming youth into their sectors. Doing so would also improve the overall welfare of the economy.

Another solution is to have stronger alumni involvement in higher education. Alumni can mentor prospective graduates and offer realistic expectations about employment opportunities and salary prospects. In addition, policymakers and higher education institutions should encourage entrepreneurship in order to support employability and, in some cases, new job creation through graduate start-ups.

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Student walking at the New York University Abu Dhabi campus located on Saadiyat Island in the UAE on 26 October 2014.

Women and Restrictive Campus Environments: A Comparative Analysis Between Public Universities and International Branch Campuses in the UAE

by Rana AlMutawa

Many nationals have criticized the presence of Western international branch campuses (IBCs) in the “Global South,” perceiving them as a new form of colonialism.¹ These critics argue that the dominance of IBCs allows Western higher education institutions to grow more powerful while local universities devolve into smaller and less important institutions, thus creating further inequalities in global educational power structures.² Though a valid concern, these criticisms ignore an important aspect of what makes IBCs particularly popular in the Gulf where they are commonly found. IBCs offer students a less restrictive environment than public universities (PUs) in the region—particularly for women.

As women in the Gulf states continue to outperform men in educational participation and achievement, a debate over the “reverse gender gap” has surfaced.³ While those who believe that a reverse gender gap exists argue that males have become underprivileged within the education system, schools and universities still maintain patriarchal gender norms.⁴ At PUs in the UAE, for example, female students’ guardians receive a text message every time a student enters or exits campus. Security guards are also stationed at

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each gate, and a female guardian's permission is required to participate in off-campus field trips.⁵

This extreme form of guardianship may negatively impact female students by training them to become more dependent on men. When students' guardians are informed of their whereabouts, the strict secondary school environment is replicated at the university level. Indeed, research has shown that personal autonomy during university provides students more opportunity for personal growth.⁶ This suggests that the restrictive environments at PUs can hinder student development. For example, Omani women studying in the US said they personally grew and became more self-sufficient because of their experience studying away from friends and family.⁷ While conservative society may prefer PUs because students can get an education within the confines of acceptable cultural norms, it's possible that students there benefit less in terms of personal growth.

The benefits of IBCs

Students at IBCs also benefit from the diversity found within their campuses. Private universities and IBCs are home to students from myriad nationalities—the exact opposite of PUs, where almost all students are nationals. Students at PUs barely interact with people of different backgrounds, religions and lifestyles during their university experience. Yet Gulf states are themselves demographically diverse, and PU students would benefit from engaging with non-nationals at an earlier stage. While this is beneficial to both men and women, the fact that Emirati females' social life outside the family are more restricted than males of the same age means that these opportunities at university are especially vital, as they may define a large part of their social relationships.

Another benefit of IBCs is that they are often much more open to the community than PUs are. Universities such as NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) are very active in their seminars and events, many of which are open to the public.⁸ In comparison, PUs such as Zayed University (ZU) host events that are typically open only to students and ZU faculty, and which require ID registration to enter for those unaffiliated with the university.

Women in the Gulf are outperforming men in educational achievement, but they have not yet broken the bonds of patriarchy.

The spatial design of these universities is also significant. For example, ZU campuses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi are completely gated, with security guarding every entrance to ensure that females do not leave campus and males do not enter the female-only areas. Meanwhile, NYUAD and the IBCs at Knowledge Village in Dubai are completely open to the public. While some private universities, such as the American University in Dubai, require ID registration for visitors to enter campus, IBCs generally remain more open to the public. The advantage of having open campuses is that they allow students and the broader local community to engage with each other more directly, thereby encouraging the free movement of ideas. Indeed, when the flow of ideas is restricted at PUs, there is less opportunity for students' personal growth and development.

The effects of gender segregation at PUs may also extend into the workforce. Jane Bristol-Rhys, a professor at ZU, has researched this issue. Although she noted that students managed to adapt quickly to a gender-integrated environment, she argued that they would become docile around Emirati men, refusing to discuss or debate things they thought Emirati men were doing wrong.⁹

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PU in the Gulf

That being said, not all PUs in the Gulf are the same. Kuwait University (KU) differs from most other PUs in the region by being open to the public—both students and visitors come and go as they please. Since there is a history of civil society and political participation in Kuwait, political and social activity is generally more noticeable on campus, too.

Despite a growing conservative base in the country, Kuwait is still considered more liberal than other Gulf states.¹⁰ New laws dictate that universities must be gender-segregated, but this has not yet been fully implemented. However, the fact that gender segregation is still a point of contention in Kuwait signifies that Kuwaitis share similar cultural concerns with their Gulf neighbors. In any case, IBCs in Kuwait are still regarded as more liberal and Westernized than KU, and there has even been a conservative backlash against IBCs in Kuwait for this reason.¹¹

Although the quality of education at IBCs is ambivalent,¹² one clear difference with PUs is campus life. Women in the Gulf are outperforming men in educational achievement, but they have not yet broken the bonds of patriarchy. These structures are still engrained in public educational institutions. Women are “protected” from the perceived threats of the outside world, sheltered from men and people who hold different nationalities, religious views and even ideas. Women are expected to embark on their studies while exposing themselves only to what is deemed culturally acceptable. And herein lies perhaps the biggest drawback for women studying at PUs in the Gulf.

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III. Commentary



John Willoughby



Fatima Badry

Higher Education Reform in the Gulf

*by John Willoughby and
Fatima Badry*

*The uncertain consequences of
globalized education*

Over the past 20 years, citizens and long-term expatriates of the Gulf have witnessed an extraordinary transformation in higher education. Prior to the late 1990s, the only major tertiary educational institutions in the region were public universities (PUs) under the direction of national governments. Virtually all of the students were national citizens, and the curricula were both largely designed and run by expatriate Arab academics who borrowed heavily from Egyptian and Iraqi models. This PU system produced graduates with professional credentials who then went to work in the public sector. Supplementing this national educational system was a generous scholarship system for talented, well-connected and largely male students who pursued advanced graduate degrees

in the West.

Starting in the mid-1990s, the monopoly with which PUs had enjoyed began to crumble. New private higher education institutions rapidly emerged throughout the Gulf. In many cases, the language of instruction was English, and this led to the importation of more Western-trained academics and administrators. In addition, as the children of expatriate professional families entered these new private universities more national and non-national women enrolled in both public and private universities alike.

While the most publicized changes have been the establishment of elite international branch campuses (IBCs) in Abu Dhabi and Qatar, the large majority of new universities and colleges do not fit this model. Instead, state policymakers and business elites have established multi-disciplinary, liberal arts universities; business groups and individual entrepreneurs have created small, for-profit technical colleges and less elite branch campuses have been established in higher education free zones in Dubai. Most PUs have responded to this competitive pressure by Westernizing their curricula and adopting English-language instruction for certain course programs.

Gulf leaders have justified these radical, pro-Western reforms as a sensible response to the challenges and opportunities created by globalization. They stress the importance of creating “knowledge economies” that are based on a robust network of technologically advanced enterprises in which national citizens play a major role as both productive workers and entrepreneurs. PUs were seen as too bureaucratic and out of touch with global educational trends, and so the state engineered wide-ranging reforms.

A more hidden reason for reforms was to allow non-state institutions to emerge in order to provide tertiary education to the children of the rapidly growing number of expatriates. While this might not have been an explicit goal of Gulf rul-

ers, any expansion of educational capacity could only work if expatriates could participate. In one sense, higher educational reform was part of a larger process of normalizing the large expatriate presence in the Gulf for the indefinite future.

Issues with higher education reform

The success of educational reform rests on ensuring that it is sustainable. How and to what extent government regulatory agencies supervise and accredit universities and colleges will be crucial. As will be the ability of decentralized governance structures within the new colleges and universities to foster creative thought. Our study of the reform process has led to six important criticisms:

1. Although the drive to create a strong, non-state higher education sector has responded to real needs and produced more vibrant and creative colleges and universities, the reform process has been erratic and quite uneven.
2. National citizens are divided over their views of the higher educational reform process. Some have resisted the perceived takeover of higher education by Western professionals, while others see higher education quality as being dependent on English-language instruction and the intensive use of Western-trained academics.
3. Universities and colleges work best when faculty play some role in curricular design and governance. Yet the top-down reform process, the existence of many small, for-profit colleges and the inability of expatriate academics to establish stable roots in their communities prevents the emergence of healthy participatory governance structures.
4. Liberal arts curricula are primarily seen as necessary for the basic acquisition of skills rather than as a fundamental necessity for the creation of flexible, creative thinkers. This problem is exacerbated by the difficulty of teaching many Gulf students to think and communicate successfully in English.
5. Higher educational reform alone is insufficient

While the most publicized changes have been the establishment of elite international branch campuses (IBCs) in Abu Dhabi and Qatar, the large majority of new universities and colleges do not fit this model.

to change the basic labor market structures of the Gulf states, which funnels national citizens into well-paid public sector jobs and expatriates into the competitive private sector market.

6. Higher education itself cannot guarantee the increased participation of women in the labor force. Other changes in the wage and benefit systems need to be implemented as well.

Reform in perspective

Despite these problems, the emerging higher education system in the Gulf is mostly stable. The new universities and colleges are establishing close links with businesses, governments and residents that will be difficult to dismantle. The expansion of educational capacity in the Gulf now means that expatriate professionals can receive relatively high-quality training within the region. Clearly, the emergence of prestigious universities is drawing more non-nationals into the Gulf. Yet it is unlikely that higher education reform will be a means to national rejuvenation and empowerment. What's more, reform may further destabilize relations between Gulf citizens and the expatriates who form a large share of the region's population.

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Higher Education in the Digital Age

by *Abdullah Al-Mutawa*

The benefits of Information and Communications Technology in the Gulf

With the advances in Information Technology (IT) and the connectivity of the Internet, more tools than ever are available to higher education providers. Using IT together with communications is usually referred to as Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and it has played a major role in the education sector both worldwide and in the Gulf region specifically during the last two decades.

Online learning tools

New tools and educational apps can support almost all areas of knowledge, and they are being used by many Gulf educational institutions to supplement face-to-face (F2F) teaching. Many instructors have replaced traditional learning tools and models with online learning materials. Examples include replacing print maps with Google ones and physical models with digital images of human anatomy. These online tools are much easier to handle, do not need any inventory or custody tracking and do not wear down from repeat use.

Virtual labs are also getting attention for the educational value they provide. Personally, I've integrated a virtual lab into one of my robotic lab experiments at Kuwait University (KU). The results were very positive. Students could login at any time to conduct experiments, using real tools without being physically present at the lab. The robots were operated using a website interface that is connected to a microcontroller (Arduino) that can run the experiment. Students get to watch the output in real-time through a web camera located on the physical voltammeter.

Learning Management Systems

A Learning Management System (LMS) is a comprehensive system that gives instructors full control over online material. Instructors can upload learning materials such as videos, lec-

ture notes or presentation slides onto the LMS, and they can set access permissions according to timeframe, the completion of requirements or passing a certain grade threshold in a prerequisite test.

LMS has become a standard tool in most Gulf educational institutions today. There are many commercial (Blackboard and Desire2Learn) or open source (Moodle) services available. Although most institutions provide the option for instructors to use LMS services, they do not enforce their use as a standard teaching tool. This leaves each instructor the choice of whether to use just the bare minimum of LMS features to broadcast news and course announcements, or to more fully utilize the entire spectrum of services available. LMS plays an important role in giving instant feedback to instructors on how well students are participating. In addition, instructors can see which course materials received the most attention, and they can then fine-tune the course to better meet students' needs.

Flipped Learning

Flipped Learning (FL) is another learning strategy that is now available thanks to ICT. Instructors can pre-record lectures and make them available either via LMS or on any other web service such as YouTube. Students are then asked to watch the lecture before class, and class time is used to discuss the material, solve some examples or reinforce the knowledge gained from the web lecture. Many implementations of FL utilize the F2F lecture time to solve homework in groups under instructor supervision. This builds positive social interactions between peer students as well as course instructors.

Although FL is still new to the Gulf, I've personally implemented it in some of my courses. It has been well-received by students. Nonetheless, FL will need high-levels of instructor preparation and a more hands-on approach to make sure lectures are watched before class. If that were to occur, I predict that FL will then become very popular in the Gulf.

MOOCs and online courses

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) use the Internet to allow a *massive* number of students

from any age and background to join a course (it is *open*), and take it at their own pace and time (it is *online* and available). Offering the course for free or at a low price also helps to increase enrollment. Some MOOCs only charge tuition if the student requests a certificate of completion, which some MOOC providers call a course enrollment upgrade.

Many elite Western universities have invested in building MOOCs both as a public service and to complement their current course offerings. Initially, it was widely expected that MOOCs would negatively affect lesser-known educational institutions by encouraging students to eschew traditional F2F instruction at these small institutions altogether. But these fears soon disappeared once it became clear that instructors were using MOOCs to facilitate and reinforce in-class learning. Instead of totally relying on MOOCs, a local institution can adapt these courses to their needs as they see fit. At the same time, local instructors can further elaborate on the material found in MOOCs by adding more examples and introducing in-class interaction.

Last semester (Fall 2016), I uploaded all of my lectures to a MOOC service provider (RWAQ) for a Computer Fundamentals course I was teaching. Twenty-nine students enrolled in the F2F class, compared to 7,500 students for the MOOC equivalent. These online courses are clearly in high demand among students.

MOOCs are still very young in the Gulf, and I have no knowledge of a higher education institution in the region that is officially offering MOOCs as part of their degree programs. There have been some personal or commercial MOOC providers—such as RWAQ, EDRAA and NADRUS—that have entered the market, but they have failed to partner with well-established academic institutions in the Gulf.

Education and “gamification”

The PlayStation, Xbox and Nintendo gaming consoles have succeeded in catching students’ attention for countless hours. There have been academic studies that show games can be used to facilitate instruction (called “gamification”). Games can also be used to create challenging problems that have yet to be solved. Hence, by using the

The use of ICT in education has made many different teaching methodologies available. Instructors can even mix and match different technologies to better suit their students’ needs.

appeal of games, instructors can better service students’ educational needs.

For example, a Swiss company has recently launched a game called CeeBot that teaches computer programming through a space robot used to solve challenging problems. I have used this game to teach a C++ course at KU, and the early results were very promising. My students kept solving problems way beyond what was assigned—as long as the game kept challenging them by offering additional difficulty levels. In comparison, when I teach traditional F2F C++ classes, students frequently complain about the number of problems to solve.

Mixing and matching digital tools

The use of ICT in education has made many different teaching methodologies available. Instructors can even mix and match different technologies to better suit their students’ needs. For example, instructors can record FL lectures via LMS or simply upload them to a MOOC service provider. At the same time, instructors will still have to handle the increasing number of students that may register in MOOC courses.

In any case, the future of higher education in the Gulf will likely entail even more use of ICT tools. Instructors will increasingly take on more of a facilitator role than a lecturer one. Handling large online courses is not an easy job, and it will require instructors to learn new skills. As for students themselves, they will no longer be constrained by their geographic location, and will be able to increasingly connect and participate with their instructors and peers through a whole host of tools available to them.

Dr. Abdullah M. Al-Mutawa is an associate professor in the Computer Engineering department at Kuwait University, the author of Blended Learning and a two-time winner of Best E-Learning Course Design.

Patterns, Trends and Issues in Qatar's Higher Education Sector

by *Nada Abdelkader Benmansour*

From universities to the labor market

In the 21st century knowledge economy, education plays an important role in preparing new labor market entrants for the workforce. The State of Qatar understands this well. According to the Ministry of Finance, last year QAR 20.4 billion was allocated for the educational sector. Yet higher levels of educational attainment have not increased Qatari youth economic participation or made pursuing a private sector career any more desirable.

Many initiatives have also been introduced to improve the educational attainment of Qatari nationals. These include the inauguration of Education City, which has attracted world-class higher education institutions to establish branch campuses in Doha, as well as the implementation of a comprehensive reform of Qatar University. As a result, there has been an increase in the educational performance of Qatari citizens, especially women.

Along the same lines, Qatar National Vision 2030 seeks to transform a rapidly growing hydrocarbon-based economy into a sustainable economy that sees most of its growth through knowledge-intensive sectors. Qatar has thus moved to diversify its industry, strengthen the private sector and engage more Qatari citizens in the labor force.

Education trends

According to the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS), the number of students in the country, both in public and private universities, has increased significantly. The number of Qatari students, both male and female nationals, in public and private universities, jumped from 9,164 to 17,503 between 2010-2011 and 2014-2015. Women

accounted for 68 percent of Qatari students in 2010-2011, rising to 70.5 percent in 2014-2015. Of those, 87 percent are enrolled in public institutions.

The Qatari government also provides generous scholarship support for study abroad programs, and the number of students participating in them has significantly increased. Almost eight times more students were studying abroad in 2014-2015 (1,591 students) compared to 2010-2011 (191 students). Consistently, at least twice as many men are benefiting from the program than women.

Cultural traditions and social attitudes continue to limit many women from taking advantage of this opportunity. At the same time, Qatari women have good access to education at home, and they are graduating from university in larger numbers than men.

Employment patterns

The labor force participation¹ rate is low for Qatari nationals throughout the economy. In 2016, 64 percent of men and 36 percent of women over the age of 15 are currently employed. Forty-six percent of these economically inactive Qatari women are homemakers, whereas 38 percent are students. In general, there has been an upward trend in labor force participation for men, as fewer are continuing on with their studies. For the 15 to 24 age group, for example, there are 5,264 women compared to 11,200 men who are economically active.

Unemployed Qataris cite lack of job opportunities as the most important cause of unemployment (see Figure 1 for other reasons of unemployment). The lack of educational requirements does not appear to be a contributing factor to unemployment in Qatar as much as the fact that many are simply waiting for government jobs. A public sector post is a key component of the social contract, and there is a certain prestige that comes with holding these jobs.

For these reasons, private sector employment remains low among nationals. According to MPDS, 54 percent of unemployed Qataris 15 years of age and older are unwilling to work in the private sector. Of those, 71 percent are female. The barriers to fe-

¹ The labor force participation rate is defined as the percentage of the total working age population who are either employed, or currently looking for work.

² Rutledge E., Al Shamsi F., Bassioni Y., and Al Sheikh H. "Women, Labour Market Nationalization Policies and Human Resource Development in the Arab Gulf States." *Human Resource Development International*. 14, no. 2 (2011): 183-98.

male labor participation are not legal in nature. Qatar has made important political, educational and social reforms that have expanded the opportunities available to women. The Qatari constitution guarantees gender equality in the workplace and the Qatarization policy, aimed at increasing the percentage of nationals in the workforce, does not differentiate based on gender. That being said, the goals of Qatarization, as originally envisioned, have not been achieved and there seems to be some cultural factors at play. According to the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI), 70 percent of female respondents agreed with the statement that “there is social pressure for women to focus on family instead of work.”

Economic and institutional issues

Although roughly 60 percent of university graduates in Qatar today are women, only a small percentage of these graduates ever enter the workforce. In 2016, of the total Qatari labor force, 68.4 percent are men and 36.8 percent are women. The high rates of educational attainment for women and the contradictory low participation in the labor market is striking. In a study on women and nationalization policies in the GCC, Emilie Rutledge and her colleagues claim that the level of educational attainment is not the obstacle to women’s economic participation. The main barriers are social and cultural.²

However, the overall low Qatari employment rate in the private sector is the broader context. For women in particular, increasing levels of educational attainment have not made pursuing a private-sector career any more desirable—and government jobs remain in short supply.

But there are signs that positive social attitudes to-

Although roughly 60 percent of university graduates in Qatar today are female, only a small percentage of these graduates ever enter the workforce.

ward working women are developing. Important female role models including H.H. Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser have emerged and are vectors for changing attitudes toward the role of women in society. In addition, the need for a second income due to economic reasons means that women face new pressures to enter the workforce.

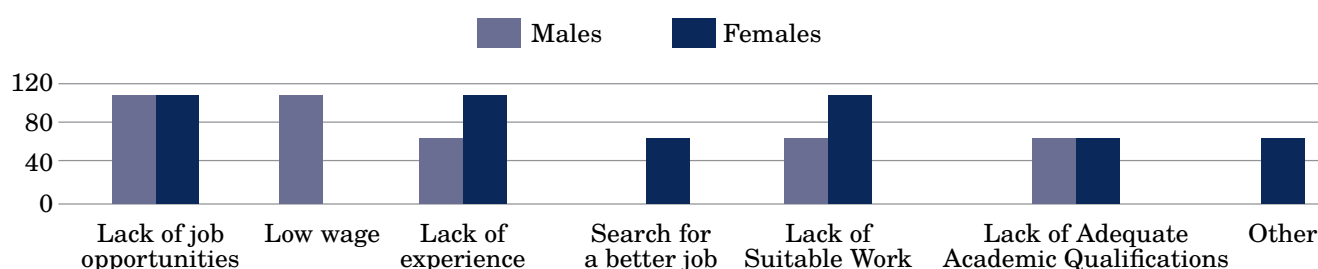
Policy recommendations

Qatar has robust economic development goals, and encouraging both male and female youth to participate in the workforce could help achieve all these goals. Fortunately, there are a number of steps Qatari authorities can take. These include: offering better education and career counselling, creating incentives for men to pursue tertiary education and providing more incentives for youth—particularly women—to take up employment in the private sector.

The government has already tackled many of the legal and social barriers to employment and female labor participation. Sustaining and expanding on these efforts will be important for the nation to benefit more fully from their potential contributions.

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Figure 1: Unemployed Qataris (15 years of age & above) by sex and reasons for unemployment



Source: Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS), Q3, 2016.



The *Kafala* System in Bahrain

by Khalil Buhazaa

A main cause of high unemployment among nationals

In May 2016, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MOLSD) released its most recent statistical report on unemployment in Bahrain. According to the data, 6,946 youth are unemployed and 3,881 of those, or 55 percent, hold university degrees. Women represent 90 percent of those unemployed university graduates.

These figures raise questions once again about the Bahraini government's ability to find sustainable solutions to the unemployment problem—particularly for university graduates. In 2009, the Ministry launched a BD 20 million

project designed to employ jobless university graduates. But the latest unemployment figures show that the project has been far from successful.

The MOLSD is not the only party responsible for high youth unemployment in Bahrain. The public sector has been oversaturated for years and is no longer able to accommodate any more graduates. As such, the private sector has to bear part of the national responsibility for youth unemployment. It should do more to accommodate unemployed graduates by relying on them instead of migrant workers, who make up more than 70 percent of the total workforce even as unemployment among young nationals is increasing.

Employment in numbers

Employers have long argued that Gulf nationals are not suited to the needs of the labor market, either academically or in terms of previous practical experience. They have also argued that the available jobs are neither suitable for nationals nor in demand by them, as they are menial jobs mainly in sectors like construction.

But until as recently as the 1980s, the Bahraini government was able to easily accommodate the number of secondary school and university graduates at the newly-established government institutions. The public sector was therefore able to open its doors to migrant workers, mainly from South and East Asia, but also from other Arab countries. However, the state's "open door recruitment policy" began to slow down in the early 1990s, coinciding with rising unemployment rates in Bahrain.

The current total labor force in Bahrain is 754,863, and about 600,000, or 78.8 percent, are migrants. Although the majority of migrant workers are concentrated in the domestic service and construction sectors, a substantial number are still employed in intermediate- and senior-level posi-

tions, particularly in the banking, medical and other service sectors. According to the Social Insurance Organization, more than 36,000 migrant workers are paid between BD 400-2,000 a month, a salary range that precludes domestic service and construction workers.

Altogether, the unemployment rate in Bahrain ranges between 3.7 and 4 percent, and a large number of those unemployed hold university degrees. Unemployed university graduates are concentrated in disciplines like business administration (342 unemployed graduates), sociology (159 unemployed graduates) and engineering (IT, civil and architecture engineers total 170 unemployed graduates).

The precariousness of migrant work

The sponsorship system, known as *kafala* in Arabic, plays a major role in making national workers less in demand. Academic qualifications or work history are not the main reasons for refusing to employ Bahraini nationals. *Kafala*, a form of “modern slavery” according to the UN and the International Labour Organization, gives employers sweeping powers as it relates to migrant workers. This nullifies the migrant workers’ legal rights, and makes them inseparable from their employers.

Kafala also puts migrant workers in a weak negotiating position with employers. Many are forced to work for long hours without overtime wages, are paid lower wages than what is initially agreed upon and work regularly through weekends and official holidays. In addition, there are many obstacles should a migrant worker decide to change his or her work. Despite recent amendments to the *kafala* system in Bahrain, deportation and other risks are still a very real concern.

All of this means that employers prefer to hire migrant workers with limited rights over national workers who have far more bargaining power.

The private sector has to bear part of the national responsibility for youth unemployment.

The question of educational qualifications is thus a secondary one. Even if the quality of the national workforce is high, the precarious legal position of migrant workers makes them more in demand by employers.

Abolish *Kafala*

The number of Bahraini university graduates is increasing over time, and they have the skills and training to enter the labor market, should they be afforded suitable opportunities. But first, the *kafala* system should be abolished. It precludes fair competition between nationals and migrant workers, and leads to many human rights violations.

At the same time, there are many deficiencies in Bahrain’s educational system that can be improved. This includes reinstating technical and vocational education projects that were dominant in Bahrain up until the 1980s. Doing so would encourage young secondary school graduates who are unable to enroll in university to enter a vocational program. In turn, these individuals can set up their own businesses or enter the labor market in a broader range of sectors, including the construction and service industries.

Khalil Buhazaa is a researcher and freelance journalist focusing on labor rights and modern slavery in the Gulf region.

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H.E. Dr. Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi
Minister of State for Higher Education
United Arab Emirates

Gulf Affairs: What strides have been made in the UAE's higher education sector? Any notable achievements over the past few years?

Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi: Before we address higher education in the UAE, we have to bear in mind that the UAE was only established in 1971. We are a young nation. My late father had to go abroad to Egypt for his education as this was the only option back then.

So the first phase of education in the UAE was focused on ending illiteracy—that was a big achievement. The second phase was about establishing a local higher education system. This began with the founding of United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) in 1976. The third—and current—phase is boosting Research and Development (R&D). We want to make the UAE a hub for higher education in the region and greater R&D is a key component of this strategy.

So far, we have had a lot of success in meeting our higher education aspirations. The UAE is ranked no. 1 in the world when it comes to the percentage of international students who are studying here. We also have some of the highest rates of female participation in higher education. As well, at any given point we have up to 150,000 students—both international and national—in the UAE. Two-thirds of these students

are enrolled in private institutions, and about one-third in public universities. In addition to UAEU, we have set up the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) and Zayed University (ZU). In the past five years, we have also seen an increase in the number of patents being awarded in the UAE, a strong indication of the progress we are making in R&D. These are all big achievements in higher education, and *inshallah* we will have many more in the years to come.

Gulf Affairs: How is the Ministry of Education aligning its roadmap with UAE Vision 2021? What role does higher education play in the vision's success and the transition to a knowledge-based economy?

Al Falasi: As the UAE's Minister of State for Higher Education, I am focused on improving the quality of higher education, expanding R&D and fostering greater collaboration with the private sector. I believe enhancing these areas are fundamental to building a sophisticated knowledge-based economy in the UAE.

Education was a strategic imperative of our founding father His Highness the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. In an increasingly integrated global economy, and with the advent of the digital age and technological advancements, education has an even more salient role today.

Furthermore, education plays a key role in inspiring Emirati youth to think differently, be creative and approach problem-solving with a critical mind—these are skillsets of the future that are integral to driving the UAE's sustainable economic growth and development.

Gulf Affairs: In light of the challenges associated with job creation in the UAE, what role is the Ministry of Education playing to help increase employment opportunities for university graduates? Is there coordination with the private sector to create industry-education linkages?

Al Falasi: The Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring employment opportunities for university graduates and recognizes that collaboration with the private sector is essential to meeting this goal.

One of the measures we have taken is to establish the Education and Human Resources Council (EHRC), which is chaired by His Highness Sheikh Abdallah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. As Minister of State for Higher Education, I have the honor of serving as secretary of this council, and all other members are ministers as well. The main objective of the EHRC is to bridge the gap between higher education and the needs of the private sector.

In addition, we are working closely with industry partners to facilitate their contribution of resources and expertise by providing research funding and professional training opportunities, among other areas of collaboration.

The Ministry recently entered into an agreement with Siemens, which has been a trusted partner of the UAE for more than 40 years, to roll out the Siemens Mechatronics Certification Program at select universities across the country. We have also forged a strategic partnership with General Electric that will pioneer a new career-oriented innovation and talent development program for Emirati youth. In addition, we supported the launch of Huawei's education challenge to help plant the seeds of innovative thinking, equip students with the creative skills and foster a culture of entrepreneurship that is integral to the UAE's

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transformation into a knowledge-based economy.

Furthermore, a key area of collaboration with the private sector is setting up a robust internship pipeline to help facilitate greater employment of Emirati university graduates in the private sector. Internships offer a risk-free way of testing different career paths. Currently, two-thirds of internships for Emirati university students are offered by the public sector but only seven percent are in the private sector.

We will also be establishing a private sector council that will focus on a number of areas, including serving as a sounding board for multinational companies to share feedback about what skills are required for particular job functions and specific industries. It will also be crucial to get industry input into skills that will be needed in the future with the objective of preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist—but will 10, 20 and 30 years down the line. There is a debate now underway about whether we invest heavily on expertise or more transferable skills. I believe we need a balance between the two.

Through these efforts, we are helping to ensure that our higher education system better aligns with the needs of the labor market and that our university students are graduating with the experience and skills they need to help realize the UAE's vision, positioning our country for future success.

Gulf Affairs: What is the status today of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the UAE? How is it evolving?

Al Falasi: When it comes to TVET, the challenge is predominantly about perception and culture. In the Middle East, broadly speaking, we have high aspirations for our children. That usually translates to wanting them to be either doctors or engineers when they grow up—this was the case in my family as well. So there is that high yet narrow expectation.

It is also important to keep in mind that our system has historically rewarded traditional forms of higher education such as a bachelor's degree. In some companies and federal universities, a graduate's salary will be mapped based on his or her degree—this is not the correct approach nor does it take into consideration the realities of the labor market. There are TVET graduates globally who get paid even more than those with bachelor's degrees. The expectation that pay must be dependent on degree level needs to change. Pay grades should actually depend on the expertise and skills each person has.

That being said, the perception of TVET programs in the UAE has evolved over the past 10 years. We have seen more and more students consider vocational education over time. TVET used to be for hobbyists—but now that our economy is very industry-based, there is a growing recognition about the need and value of this higher education path.

We also need to become more flexible with our approach to higher education to ensure that students pursue degrees that are most suitable for them—whether that be bachelor's degrees or TVET—and can then find meaningful employment opportunities that align with their interests and skillsets.

HCT is a good example of the TVET model in the UAE. It is an applied institute that resembles vocational education. Although HCT diplomas take two to three years to complete, the number of graduates employed within six months is much higher than for both UAEU and ZU. In fact, HCT graduates are the most employable, even though they do not hold bachelor's degrees.

Gulf Affairs: How is the expansion of private universities and international branch campuses (IBCs) in the UAE changing traditional public education? What impact does this have on the country?

Al Falasi: The expansion of private universities and international branch campuses (IBCs) is having a very healthy impact on the overall higher education ecosystem in the UAE. We are a very diverse country with over 200 different nationalities living here. As a result, our higher education system, too, must be diverse to reflect the varied academic interests of the current and future university student population.

For example, the London Business School (LBS) recently celebrated its 10th anniversary in Dubai. It has the same admissions requirement as its London campus. IBCs like LBS, Sorbonne, and NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) increase the attractiveness of pursuing higher education in the UAE—students receive the same university experience and quality of education but in a location that may be more accessible for them.

You also have to remember that each IBC was invited to the UAE for a specific reason and keeping in mind the future needs of our country's economy. For example, instead of setting up an MIT branch in Masdar, we created a local institute affiliated with MIT. So there are different models of education. Masdar is a collaborative approach, whereas NYUAD and Sorbonne are branch campuses. You really need a mixture of these different higher education models to have a diverse offering.

At the same time, higher education institutes like the American University of Sharjah (AUS) take another approach. The UAE wanted to create a specific university focused on teaching outcomes. AUS has one of the best civil engineering programs in the entire Middle East, among other highly-regarded academic programs.

In addition, we have the benefit of individual emirates' taking an active role in shaping their own higher education ecosystem. In Dubai, there are more management institutions such as LBS as a result of the number of people who work in professional and financial services. Abu Dhabi instead skews more toward R&D, given the number of industrial firms in the emirate.

Gulf Affairs: What is being done to improve the state of R&D and scientific output in the UAE? Can you list some recent milestones or achievements?

Al Falasi: Governments all over the world understand the importance of investing in R&D as it opens up opportunities for faster economic growth and creates sustainable wealth that is independent of natural and non-renewable resources.

Furthermore, there exists a direct correlation between a country's focus on R&D and its economic competitiveness. The UAE government recognizes this and the primary role R&D plays in economic progress as reflected in the UAE Vision 2021 which highlights science, technology and innovation as primary drivers of growth and progress.

It is with these aspirations in the mind that the UAE's Science, Technology & Innovation (STI) policy was announced in November 2015. It offers a comprehensive framework for achieving a true knowledge economy, including targets to increase R&D investment by threefold and increase the percentage of knowledge workers in the country to 40 per cent by 2021.

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In addition, the STI policy includes a set of educational and scientific initiatives that will help prepare our university graduates to align with the needs of the future economy. Specifically, the policy aims to redouble the focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in all UAE educational institutions as well as develop specialized R&D infrastructure to support entrepreneurship.

UAE University in Al Ain has been a pioneer in R&D and subsequently, Khalifa University, Masdar Institute and the Petroleum Institute have been driving scientific discovery in the UAE for many years. These four institutions—one federal and three local—have developed a strong R&D foundation for our country. And with the merger of Khalifa University, Masdar Institute and the Petroleum Institute, we are leveraging their combined resources and expertise to strengthen the country's output of quality research.

Gulf Affairs: What role does Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and digitization play in the UAE's higher education sector? How do you foresee this evolving in the coming years?

Al Falasi: The UAE has always been a leader and first-mover in many areas, but we have lagged behind when it comes to ICT and digitization in higher education.

Historically, the perception was that online learning meant lower quality. Yet we have studies that show that when implemented correctly, the educational outcome associated with online learning is strong. Studies have even shown that with blended learning—a combination of online and in-person learning—retention of knowledge is even higher.

In any case, as our system matures and we refine our regulations, we will grant a lot more autonomy to institutions to more fully embrace ICT in higher education.



**Dr. Habib Abul
Secretary General
Private Universities Council (PUC)
State of Kuwait**

Gulf Affairs: Kuwait's private higher education sector was launched in the early 2000s. What progress has been made in this sector so far?

Habib Abul: Since the Private Universities Council (PUC) law was issued in 2000, numerous licenses have been granted to universities, colleges and international branch campuses (IBCs). Today, we have 12 private educational institutions that offer diplomas, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. These institutions offer diverse course programs that are important to the Kuwaiti labor market and economy.

Gulf Affairs: What is the PUC's model? And what is the scope of its regulatory activities?

Abul: When it comes to private higher education, PUC is responsible for everything from A to Z, including initial approvals and accreditation of certificates. After an application has been submitted with a corresponding market study, feasibility study, accreditation requirements and facilities proposal, licenses are then issued. Of course, all these materials have to meet international accreditation standards. Once operational, PUC conducts ongoing institutional accreditation and facility reviews to maintain quality control. PUC also offers and manages comprehensive scholarship programs in order to provide Kuwaiti students

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with the financial means to achieve their educational aspirations.

Gulf Affairs: What are the main challenges facing higher education and vocational training in Kuwait today? What is PUC doing to help address these challenges? Any key results on the impact of your work?

Abul: From an investor's point of view, a university has to be built with ample space to allow for the construction of a high-quality campus. The land limitations in Kuwait hinder the rapid expansion of private higher institutions. To address this challenge, PUC acquired several large land plots throughout the country and has provided leasing facilities—in coordination with the Ministry of Finance—to investors. Because of this arrangement, many institutions were able to start their operations.

Another key challenge is adequately preparing high school students for university. Therefore, PUC has decided to cover the cost of foundation years for scholarship students in English, math and science courses. Students and universities have flourished as a result. In the past four years, private colleges and universities in Kuwait have become competitive with international universities in a range of sectors, and have contributed to workshops, international conferences and competitions—students have even won many prizes in these competitions. In addition, private universities in Kuwait have become accredited from several major international accreditation organizations.

Gulf Affairs: PUC notably provides scholarships for thousands of students to study in Kuwait. What is the motive behind this policy? How does it contribute to the fulfilment of higher education needs in Kuwait?

Abul: The number of high school graduates has been increasing and Kuwait University (KU), which is the only public higher education institution in the country, is unable to cope with demand. In order to resolve this issue, PUC started the internal scholarship program, which has helped sponsor tens of thousands of students since its inception. This program also helps reduce the cost of higher education because study abroad scholarships are much more expensive. This approach reduces overall education costs for the government. In the past few years, approximately 4,000 students annually were granted these internal scholarships.

Gulf Affairs: Do private higher education institutions in Kuwait offer enough course subjects to support economic development and the labor market's needs?

Abul: Currently, universities cover a wide spectrum of course specializations, ranging from business, to engineering, to computer sciences, to information technology to social and legal sciences. We are also working on introducing other course programs including various medical science majors. Based on feasibility studies that have been conducted, we believe that these disciplines cover a wide range of market demand.

Gulf Affairs: There is an international trend of increasing student demand for post-graduate programs. What share does post-graduate education make up among Kuwait's institutions?

Abul: Several higher education institutions are licensed to provide post-graduate education in subjects including business and law, while engineering is in preparation. Advanced degrees complement tertiary education, and we encourage institutions to expand their course offerings beyond the bachelor's degree level.

el. That's as long as certain conditions and regulations are met so that we can ensure the quality of these degrees remains high.

Gulf Affairs: In your view, what distinguishes Kuwait's private higher education scene?

Abul: One distinction is that it is governed by legal regulations that allow institutes to compete on an equal basis with public institutions. Private higher education institutions benefit from PUC being the sole regulatory body, and all private higher education institutes have to be either affiliated with or branches of top quality institutions. The internal scholarship program is also a unique aspect of Kuwait's private higher education scene.



Warren H. Fox
Chief of Higher Education
Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA)
Government of Dubai

Gulf Affairs: KHDA was established in 2006 as the quality assurance and regulatory authority that oversees private education in Dubai. What have been KHDA's main achievements since its launch a decade ago?

Warren H. Fox: The government has worked hard to attract internationally-renowned universities and colleges to set up international branch campuses (IBCs) in its various free zones. Executive Council Resolution no. 21 (2011) established that higher education institutions in the free zones be brought under KHDA's authority. Now all the academic qualifications of students from approved institutions are certified by KHDA, which in turn are recognized in Dubai by all public and private entities for all purposes.

In 2008, KHDA also established the University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB). This is an independent board of higher education experts from around the world. UQAIB makes recommendations about whether to issue academic authorization to new institutions, as well as whether to renew authorization for existing universities and colleges. It also approves all new degree programs before they are first offered to students. Importantly, the quality of any branch campus or degree program must be equivalent to its parent institution. This is known as the Equivalency Validation Model (EVM).

At the same time, the EVM approach is flexible and recognizes different national accreditations within home countries. This makes it easier to attract international providers and students. Dubai can now boast being an attractive destination for international higher education, and 80 percent of students report high levels of satisfaction at IBCs.

KHDA has partnership agreements with other Quality Assurance (QA) agencies in the US, the UK, Australia, Malaysia and Hong Kong. KHDA has cooperated in QA reviews, shared processes and data, exchanged information and collaborated with staff from QA agencies in these countries.

KHDA has also set up the Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG), an international group of key higher education hubs and major Transnational Education (TNE) providers. QBBG connects QA experts from around the world to support the modern global education journey, and it encourages countries to collaborate within a multilateral partnership approach. KHDA's higher education initiatives in quality assurance have been presented at prominent international conferences including Going Global, The Economist, OBHE and WISE.

Attracting, as well as retaining, high-quality international students is key to the UAE's goal of developing a skilled workforce. To that end, the federal government has amended labor policy to allow students to work part-time, which has helped students cover living expenses and tuition costs. In addition, new resident visa policies have made it easier for universities in the free zones to issue visas to foreign students.

Gulf Affairs: What are the main challenges facing higher education and vocational training in the UAE today? What is KHDA doing to help address them?

Fox: The main challenges facing higher education in the UAE today relate to ensuring that qualified school leavers meet the admissions requirements of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), especially in English and math.

The National Agenda was announced at the beginning of 2014 by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid. Two major targets were announced: By 2021, the UAE will be among the 15th and 20th highest performing countries in TIMSS and PISA, respectively. This will support Dubai in achieving the goal of being in the top performing regions, and it will also ensure school leavers meet the admissions requirements of HEIs.

Students from outside the UAE wishing to enroll in HEIs in Dubai, and who do not currently meet admissions requirements, have various options. They can access a range of foundation or vocational programs that will prepare them for a successful transition to higher education.

Gulf Affairs: What is your quality assurance approach toward HEIs and their programs? What regulations are in place to ensure success?

Fox: UQAIB's EVM tracks the quality of the various branch campuses in three key areas. Firstly, the degree programs and parent institution of the IBC must be accredited by the official higher education system in that country. Secondly, the standards used in the home country must be acceptable to Dubai and the international higher education community. And finally, there must be evidence that the quality of a HEP branch and its programs are equivalent to its home HEP. Such evidence would preferably include existing

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cross-border quality assurance provisions from the HEP home country.

Broadly, our aim at KHDA is to continuously improve quality rather than to simply meet certain minimum standards. While an institution may meet the quality assurance requirements of their parent institution's QA body, both KHDA and UQAIB encourage the sharing of good practices whenever possible. We currently have examples of practices that were first developed at Dubai IBCs and were later exported to home institutions.

In order to support the sharing of good practices, KHDA has developed a series of UQAIB Good Practice Guides that help institutions determine the ways in which various quality assurance-related issues can be developed in the Dubai context. These guides do not expand the scope of the UQAIB requirements, but instead addresses issues that are already found in the current version of the UQAIB Quality Assurance Manual. The guides are not prescriptive, and they focus on providing exemplar options that can be adapted by each institution to meet their individual needs. Good Practice Guides are currently available to support HEIs in areas such as: the assessment and moderation of student work, external evaluation of standards of student achievement, grievance procedures, industry and market engagement, localizing the curriculum and student feedback.

Gulf Affairs: Dubai has the largest number of IBCs in the world, whereas neighboring Abu Dhabi chose to limit its IBC offerings. Can you explain Dubai's approach?

Fox: The semi-independent nature of the UAE has led individual emirates to develop free zones, which exempt organizations operating within each zone from federal regulation. One structure has been developed under KHDA's umbrella to regulate free zone institutions in Dubai; another structure has been created to regulate those located in free zones in Ras Al Khaima (RAKFZ).

Regulatory structures have evolved to license and accredit institutions in free zones that do not require the Council on Academic Accreditation's (CAA) approval. UQAIB was established to be complimentary to the CAA, and the UQAIB Quality Assurance Manual was written in this manner. KHDA works with the CAA on a variety of matters pertaining to higher education—from data sharing to new HEP applications in the emirate.

While the federal quality assurance mechanism licenses institutions based on meeting a common set of minimum standards, UQAIB's policy simply ensures that each foreign institution provides an educational program equivalent to that of its home campus. Awards from IBCs are from the parent campus and are internationally accredited. IBCs that are CAA-accredited institutions offer degrees from the UAE, and these awards carry local rather than internationally-accredited degrees.

It is up to each institution to decide if they need local accreditation. However, most IBCs opt for international accreditation, which students appear to prefer. Enrollment in UQAIB-reviewed institutions has grown over the last eight years, an indication of strong student satisfaction. The Dubai Higher Education Landscape publishes enrolment data, and this can be found in our publications section on the KHDA website.

A national qualification framework has been established, and this will help develop a process to increase

the recognition and validity of training at all levels for the benefit of students. The federal government and each of the emirates collaborated on this initiative. It's a significant step forward for solidifying the UAE's position as a regional education hub.

Gulf Affairs: Course offerings in Dubai's private universities seem to focus on subjects related to business, law, communications and technology. On what basis are these course offerings determined?

Fox: KHDA makes sure that HEIs offer programs that align with Dubai's Vision 2021.

Gulf Affairs: Research output is central to how HEIs are assessed in more developed countries. How does KHDA measure research output in Dubai? Can you share some key successes?

Fox: Many of the HEIs were initially established several years ago as teaching institutions. Increasingly, research activities have become a focus area for faculty and students. Partnerships link some of Dubai's IBCs with various industries and organizations, mostly in Europe and Asia.

Research is known to be at the heart of sustainable development worldwide. As the UAE, and in particular Dubai, diversifies its economic resources to reduce reliance on oil revenues, there's a growing awareness about the importance of academia and industry working more closely together.

To this end, KHDA has facilitated the establishment of the Dubai Research Steering Committee, which was launched in 2014. The Committee's objective is to raise the level of research-related collaboration among higher education campuses, to share available resources for the greater benefit of all and to enhance ties to local industries. Within a short time, the Research Connect @Dubai newsletter was set up to showcase local research, and its first edition included 30 articles. More than 40 articles will be found in the second edition, which will be published soon. All that being said, what is lacking is a clear list of national priorities for research as well as a competitive funding program similar to those found at HEIs abroad.

Gulf Affairs: From your perspective, what are some of the priority issues GCC countries should focus on when it comes to improving their higher education systems?

Fox: The first would be to provide a first-rate higher education sector. The second would be to ensure that degree programs provide students with skills that are catered to the knowledge economy. The third, and final priority, would be to foster a learning environment that supports the development of happy and empowered students.



Adrian Chadwick
Regional Director, MENA
British Council

Gulf Affairs: What is the British Council’s mandate? In which areas has the Council recently been working on in the Gulf states?

Adrian Chadwick: One of the founding ideals of the British Council is: “to make the life and thought of the British People more widely known abroad; and to promote a mutual interchange of ‘knowledge and ideas’ with other peoples.”

The British Council has always focused its cultural relations activities on sharing some of the UK’s most attractive cultural assets. These include the English language, the arts, education and science. In recent years, interest in the British Council sharing UK values such as the rule of law, diversity and gender equality has grown. Our intent has always been to build long-term relationships based on shared agendas. In the context of the Gulf, we have been working on the ground for more than 60 years, and arguably there has never been more political will on both sides to collaborate. This can be seen through the 20,000 students from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states who are currently studying in the UK. And the doubling to more than 170,000 Gulf residents who are studying UK programs in GCC countries as of the 2014/15 academic year.

Another area which has seen positive growth is institutional and research links. In July 2016, the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), in collaboration with the British Council and

the Science Innovation Network (SIN), launched a call for joint research partnerships in water, energy, healthcare and cybersecurity. We received 172 applications. In the first funding round, a £2.4 million bilateral research grant will be awarded in early 2017. Through this joint initiative, we're supporting better research performance and capability in the GCC region. We have also stepped up our work in quality assurance, inclusive education and soft skills training programs.

These growing links are supported by English. Last year, 60,000 men and women studied across our GCC teaching centers, and we delivered 354,000 UK English-language, professional and university examinations. This work allows students in the Gulf to connect with educational and work opportunities worldwide, and to more easily contribute to and benefit from the global exchange of knowledge and ideas.

Gulf Affairs: What are some priority issues that GCC countries should focus on in improving their higher education sectors?

Chadwick: I feel that GCC countries have identified the right areas to prioritize, and I would highlight two in particular: core skills including languages across all faculties, and increasing research quality and output. I would add that there's a need for far more consistent use of data to measure performance in terms of student satisfaction, graduate employment and return on research investment.

In addition, bringing the voice of the labor market more into the higher education sector will be important in generating more applied research, including that which can be monetized. It will also support the governments' drive to embed core skills such as communication, teambuilding, resilience, entrepreneurial and critical thinking into curricula even further. These are the skills students need to be good citizens and to thrive in a globalized world. And yet, employers in this region have warned that graduates lack these soft skills, even though they often have good technical abilities. That's why, in partnership with HSBC, we piloted an innovative program for students in their final year called *Taqaddam* that develops key skills for study, life and work. We have seen positive results so far.

Gulf Affairs: In which areas do you feel the Gulf states have most improved in higher education over the past few years?

Chadwick: One should begin by acknowledging that Gulf states have invested heavily in higher education in recent years. The Saudi government alone has more than tripled the number of universities in their country. This includes the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, an international, post-graduate research university, as well as Princess Noura University, which significantly expands the range of subjects available to women in Saudi Arabia.

Research output in the Gulf has also risen four-fold from 4,000 publications to 18,000 between 2008 and 2014, according to Scopus. The Royal Society Atlas of Islamic World Science and Innovation Report—which the British Council co-authored—also detailed other areas of progress in the Gulf and wider MENA region. Gulf states have also invested heavily in scholarships, sending well over 150,000 young men and women overseas to study. On their return, these students will become an incredible resource of internationally-trained and connected professionals who will drive innovation. Many of these students will staff universities in their home countries.

Thanks to government policies, there has also been an increased focus on STEM subjects and quality assurance. This will strengthen the technology and innovation sectors' contributions to the economy, which

IV. Interviews

in turn will contribute to the labor market and the GCC's workforce nationalization goals.

Lastly, another positive development is increased access to higher education via e-learning. In addition to being the UK's highest growth area, it is also cheaper for the end user. The GCC region already has good overall access to technology, and this makes higher education far more accessible to everyone, including women.

Gulf Affairs: What has been done to facilitate cultural and academic exchanges between Britain and the GCC states? Do you see any new opportunities going forward?

Chadwick: At the cultural level, there is an enormous amount going on. UK/UAE 2017 is a year of collaboration and cultural exchange between the UK and the UAE, and it is being organized by the British Council. Throughout 2017, we will also collaborate with a wide range of British and Emirati partners to create a diverse program of more than 20 projects and events across the UAE that span the arts, literature, education, society, sport, science and trade. These initiatives follow recent cultural years in both Qatar and Bahrain. Last month, the UK government also provisionally agreed to a major three-year program of cultural and sport collaboration that will be jointly delivered by the British Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

In terms of education, many UK universities have identified the GCC as a priority area for partnerships in teaching, research and development and international student recruitment. The British Council, Universities UK and other UK organizations are actively supporting them in that regard.

In the future, we expect to see more demand for flexible partnerships, private education and open learning. GCC governments are looking to the UK to help deliver both higher education and tertiary education in a variety of ways. The innovative 2+2 program we brokered with the Saudi government allows diploma holders to enroll in Year 2 of UK degrees in various technical fields. This is an early example of what can be achieved, and about 600 men and women have already enrolled at 17 UK universities. Another example is the British College of Bahrain, a partnership between a Bahraini owner and Salford University, and which will offer undergraduate degrees in science and technology from a purpose-built campus.

All of these initiatives support better cultural understanding that leads to more trust and confidence in UK higher education, as well as greater investment into it in both the UK and the GCC region.

Gulf Affairs: How can British institutions assist with the development of research capacity at higher education institutions in GCC states?

Chadwick: Firstly, UK institutions need to understand the issues facing both countries and institutions in the GCC so that they can identify areas of mutual interest and benefit. It is also important to recognize that Gulf universities, like elsewhere, want to engage with international universities that are looking for long-term partnership and not merely short-term financial gain. Encouraging new and better linkages between researchers and innovators using a variety of funding mechanisms can support this goal.

The development of research capacity needs to happen at a number of different levels—from school right up to the post-doctoral level. This means working in partnership with institutions from the undergraduate level through to the doctoral level, as well as working to develop depth and quality within that partnership. It means encouraging exchanges in which UK researchers meet with their GCC counterparts to identify

and define projects of mutual benefit. The British Council's Researcher Links is a good example of this because it encourages international scientists to meet one another in order to develop research in mutual areas of interest.

Gulf Affairs: Have recent political and economic developments in the region affected the GCC states' efforts to improve higher education?

Chadwick: The GCC states have remained relatively stable and secure throughout the turbulent past five years. And in spite of the declining oil price and general economic tightening, government investment in education has remained relatively high.

What has been evident is the increased determination of GCC governments to invest in developing young people so they can in the future usher in the peaceful and successful transitions of Gulf economies and societies.

Paradoxically, tightening public expenditures may actually help higher education performance in GCC countries. It should force governments to focus more on return on investment in public education by improving data and performance metrics, learning and research outcomes and focusing on skills development and graduate employability.

Gulf Affairs: Are universities adequately preparing—in both quality and the availability of degrees—youth for the demands of the labor market? Any notable mismatches or in-need skillsets that are not currently on offer?

Chadwick: The issues of relevance and quality are being taken very seriously by universities in the GCC region. However, institutions perhaps tend to focus more on the quality of the academic offerings than on preparing students for the labor market.

There is a clear demand from both employers and young people themselves for more effective teaching of core skills, self-directed learning, languages and intercultural fluency. Governments are also investing in technology in education. They recognize the critical role that technology-enabled learning plays in developing the skills that prepare students for a more technical future and for jobs that have not yet been invented. Arguably, there is a continuing mismatch between the choice of subjects being taken at university and the needs of the labor market. Students on the whole still prefer to take humanities degrees. A related challenge for Gulf states—and many other countries including the UK—is to encourage more young people to opt for semi-skilled technical education that better prepares them for growth areas including creative industries and small to medium enterprises (SMEs).

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, a greater focus on STEM subjects, core skills and languages would better prepare students for the labor market. Creating entrepreneurship hubs for students who wish to begin working on start-ups while at university would also help. That being said, universities will need to involve employers in teaching and learning in more meaningful ways. For example, they could support greater engagement with their local communities by encouraging businesses to apply university research outputs. Universities could also allow their researchers to perform outreach work in local high schools. While this requires more flexibility and resources, it is essential for developing curricula that better meets the needs of the labor market and prepares young people for a successful education and fulfilling career.

V. Timeline

Recent Milestones in the GCC's Higher Education Sector

2000

July: The Kuwaiti government issues Decree no. 34 for the establishment of private higher education.

September: The Arab Open University is established. The university is headquartered in Kuwait and has additional branches in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

2001

The Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) is set up to oversee the accreditation of HEIs and programs. OAC reviews amendments related to the National Qualifications Framework awarded by HEIs. In 2010, OAC is replaced by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA).

2003

The Dubai Knowledge Park opens. It is the world's only free zone dedicated to Human Resource Management, and it's foreign-owned.

2004

Qatar University (QU) begins structural reforms following the recommendations of a commissioned study carried out by RAND Corporation, a US think tank. Following this, a number of QU's degree programs are accredited by international bodies. QU introduces more than 30 graduate programs by 2015, along with spending \$63 million on research between 2010-2011.

2005

Saudi Arabia establishes the King Abdullah Scholarship Program.

The Saudi National Center for E-Learning and Distance Learning is set up.

Law no. 3 (2005) establishes the Higher Education Council (HEC) in Bahrain.

June: Royal Decree no. 54 (2005) establishes The Research Council (TRC) in Oman. It is chaired by Sayyid Shihab Bin Tariq Al-Said, an adviser to Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said.

2006

Law no. 30 establishes the Knowledge and Human Development Authority in Dubai (KHDA). KHDA is responsible for regulating private higher education in the emirate.

The Qatar Foundation launches the Qatar National Research Fund to provide resources for undergraduate and graduate students, in addition to established researchers in Qatar who partner with other researchers across the globe.

February 19: Paris-Sorbonne University signs an agreement with the Government of Abu Dhabi to provide first-rate higher education in the emirate. The Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi opens its doors in October 2006.

September: The Kuwaiti government establishes its internal scholarship program, which provides funds for nation-

als to study in private universities in at home.

2007

In Saudi Arabia, Technical and Vocational Training and Education (TVET) is brought under the authority of the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation.

The Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute (ADVETI) is established.

February 25: The MIT & Masdar Institute Cooperative Program is set up in Abu Dhabi in order to integrate theory with practice, as well as to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

April: The Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) is established as part of TECOM Group. DIAC caters to the needs of the region's growing and diverse academic community, and it is the world's largest free zone dedicated to higher education.

2008

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa establishes Bahrain Polytechnic by Royal Decree no. 65.

2009

The King Abdullah University of Science & Technology (KAUST) is set up with an estimated \$10-15 billion endowment. KAUST is the first co-ed university in Saudi Arabia that uses English-language instruction.

George Mason University closes its branch campus in Ras Al Khaima, UAE due to financial issues.

December: NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) opens the doors to its downtown campus. It is the first time a major US research university establishes a comprehensive liberal arts branch campus in the Gulf.

2010

The Saudi government's higher education spending triples between 2004-2010.

OAAA is established to continue OAC's accreditation role. OAAA focuses on enabling Omani graduates to compete in the job market, and to be able to contribute effectively to the country's sustainable development.

Royal Decree no. 30 (2010) tasks TRC with drawing up a national plan for scientific research in Oman. As a result, TRC becomes the main policymaking body and funding agency for scientific research in the country.

Michigan State University (MSU) closes its branch campus in Dubai after attracting only one-third of the expected number of students.

2011

The Saudi Technology Development and Investment Company (Taqnia) is set up.

V. Timeline

2012

More than 3,000 Kuwaiti students are granted internal scholarships for the 2012/2013 calendar year.

The Omani government establishes the Education Council with Royal Decree no. 48. The Council is the main policymaking body for education in Oman.

The Qatar National Research Strategy (QNRS) is established. It aims to make Qatar a leading center for research and development and innovation.

2013

The number of HEIs in the Gulf now total 681 for Saudi Arabia, 81 for the UAE, 55 for Oman, 21 for Kuwait, 16 for Qatar, and 14 for Bahrain.

2014

Saudi enrollment in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program reaches close to 60,000 students for the 2014/2015 calendar year. This figure marks a 2,000 percent increase over the last decade. Saudi Arabia becomes the 4th-largest sending country to the US and the 5th-largest to Canada.

The Emirates Diplomatic Academy (EDA) is established in Abu Dhabi. EDA equips the UAE's current and future diplomats with the knowledge and multi-disciplinary skills to effectively serve their country.

June: HEC approves Bahrain's first National Strategy for Higher Education and Scientific Research (2014-2024).

2015

In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of General Education and the Ministry of Higher Education are merged to form the Ministry of Education.

Kuwait's Minister of Education announces the availability of 30,923 seats for high school graduates to enroll in HEIs for the 2015/2016 academic year.

2016

Saudi Arabia unveils the final phase of its e-governance system "Faris," which covers all administrative affairs and personnel issues in the country's education sector.

May: The British Accreditation Council (BAC) partners with HEC in Bahrain to establish a national university accreditation system.

October: Khalifa University, Masdar Institute and the Petroleum Institute are unified under one umbrella university. This decision is made during a meeting headed by Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi

2017

The Saudi Ministry of Education unveils a new initiative pairing its scholarship program with a job placement scheme.

January: The UAE Space Agency signs MoUs with eight universities in the UAE in order to support the space industry, and to share research and technology.



Call for Articles

Private Sector Development in the GCC

Submission due date: Friday, March 3, 2017
Word limit: 1,000 – 1,500 words

***Gulf Affairs* invites scholars to submit original analytical articles for its upcoming issue entitled “Private Sector Development in the GCC.”**

Gulf Affairs is a journal founded by OxGAPS | Oxford Gulf & Arabian Peninsula Studies Forum, a University of Oxford-based platform. The journal is exclusively dedicated to furthering knowledge and dialogue on the pressing issues and challenges facing the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Each issue is dedicated to a particular theme, allowing for a comprehensive coverage from various analytical perspectives and fields of study. Accepted articles are submitted to reviewers for comment prior to publication.

To capture the complexity of the various issues and challenges around Private Sector Development in the GCC, articles are encouraged from a wide range of disciplinary lenses including: Economics, Politics/Political Economy, International Relations, Law, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Area Studies, Education and History. Balanced articles supported by sufficient and credible sources which offer a unique perspective on the theme will likely be accepted for publication.¹

***Gulf Affairs* welcomes analytical articles on (though not limited to) the following areas:**

- What role does the private sector have in supporting government-led ‘national visions’ in GCC countries?
- What are the challenges facing SMEs and entrepreneurship?
- What barriers are facing women in the business world and challenges to increasing their participation in the private sector?
- What are the current prospects for privatisation and PPPs across the GCC region?
- How are Family businesses developing? What is the outlook for IPOs in this sector?
- Which new industries are likely to be successful in the drive for private sector expansion?
- How are current policies and regulations impacting private sector growth? How are companies adapting to policies aimed at nationalizing the workforce?
- How have state-business relations evolved in recent years?
- How have Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) Investments and Debt Markets impacted private sector development in the GCC?
- What have been the implications of the low(er) oil price environments on the private sector? How will energy price reform, VAT and other taxes impact companies in the region?

Submission Guidelines: Please send articles to gulfaffairs@oxgaps.org by Friday, March 3, 2017. Authors whose articles have been accepted for review will be notified within two weeks after the submission deadline.

¹ For citing and referencing, use Chicago Manual of Style endnotes

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