

# The Role of Government in Education

## Historical View

Modern universities in Iraq were established in the second half of the last century, beginning with the University of Baghdad in 1957, uniting several constituent colleges in the process. During the 1960s five more universities were established – the University of Technology and the Al-Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad as well as universities in Basrah, Mosul, and Sulaymaniyah. The further development of higher education in Iraq was characterized by establishment of technical institutes reflecting the considerable demand for qualified technicians created by the flourishing oil industry.

The GoI pursued a policy of establishing a university in each governorate, responding to both the demands of equity and the growing demand for higher education. Fourteen new universities were founded and by the mid-twentieth century, Iraqi universities were the best in the region and Iraq had achieved exceptional progress in enrollment at all levels of education. However, over the past twenty-five years the financial resources of the education system have diminished.

## Higher Education Today

Iraqi policy-makers see the restoration of the education system as an important pillar in the effort to rebuild Iraqi society. Iraq's higher education sector has the potential to play an important role in overcoming the country's widening sectarian divides and fostering long-term peace and stability. As a leading actor within Iraq's civil society, it could offer an institutional venue for resolving the country's political, social and economic problems while promoting respect for human rights and democratic principles on campus and in wider society.

Two ministries are responsible for the education system in Iraq. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is in charge of pre-school, primary and secondary education. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) is responsible for all post-secondary education, including technical education, and research centers. Iraq's current higher education system comprises 24 universities and 42 technical institutes under the management of the MHESR. This includes 200 colleges, 800 departments, and 28 research centers.

There are also 25 private colleges offering programs in computer sciences, business administration, economics and management and, at the American University of Iraq in Sulaymaniyah, a private school curriculum based on the U.S. model. Nation-wide, there are 350,000 undergraduate students, 15,000 postgraduate students and nearly 30,000 teaching faculty. The major fields of study offered by the universities are: education, arts, law, social sciences, administration, economics, natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical sciences, veterinary medicine and agriculture.

Technical education in Iraq is delivered through 37 technical institutes and eight technical colleges. There is at least one Institute in each of the 18 governorates. Iraqi higher education has a strong orientation towards technical education and the technical institutes have grown significantly since the early 1970s. These qualifications cover over 60 fields of specialization which include engineering, administration, medical subjects, agriculture and applied arts.

Iraqi universities need curriculum materials in all fields and up-to-date textbooks. There is a great need to draw a new generation of Iraqis into the education field to serve as teachers and administrators. The GoI is also facilitating the return of faculty members who may have fled to other countries in the 1990s. Iraqi universities are now considered to be safe, with no systematic patterns of threats or harassment directed toward faculty members or administrators. The MHESR reports that approximately 100 Iraqi expatriates inquire every month about the possibility of returning home to resume their teaching careers.

Of the approximately 25,000 academic university teaching staff, 55% are male and 45% female; 43% of the teaching force is concentrated in Baghdad. The average staff/student teaching ratio is 1:13 being much more favorable than neighboring countries such as Jordan (1:30) and Saudi Arabia (1:20). In Iraq, the minimum educational qualification for a teaching post in higher education is a master's degree. However, one third of the teaching staff lacks a master's degree; 28% of the staff has doctorates, 39% masters and 33% bachelor's degrees.

The Iraqi Academy of Sciences, founded in 1948, was a center for fellows from various disciplines including modern and ancient Middle Eastern languages, history, social and physical sciences. Iraqi academics are of the view that the Academy can reestablish itself as one of the leading research centers of the country.

While in pre-war days, Iraqi scientists were publishing widely in international and regional journals, very few articles were published in the last decade. The Iraq Virtual Science Library (IVSL), which offers free, full-text access to thousands of scientific journals from major publishers as well as a large collection of online educational materials, has the potential to enhance research and connections to U.S. institutions. Due to connectivity issues, it has yet to reach its potential.