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The Future Of Iraq Project



Education

Working Group

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Education Working Group

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Tab 1: Post Conflict Education

The Education Working Group conducted only one meeting. Follow-up meetings were not held due to the awarding of the education contract by the U.S. Agency for International Development to Creative Associates. Many of the Iraqi participants were hired by Creative Associates due to their expertise in this area.

(*) Reflects consensus of the participants in the working group. Other papers reflect the views of their authors.

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Discussion paper for the Transitional Justice Working Group

POST CONFLICT EDUCATION

December 2002

There will be no dispute that in a democratic Iraq, a fair and comprehensive Education system will be crucial in bringing about the changes needed to permit Iraq and all Iraqi citizens to blossom to the point where they can begin to realise their full potential.

Therefore it is important to give priority to and place proper stress on the need to re-establish a full and fair Education system available to all Iraqis – free and comprehensive at the primary and secondary levels and free on the basis of merit at the post secondary technical institute and the tertiary University levels.

It must be recognised that before the advent of the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein, Iraq had what is generally regarded as a high-quality education system at all levels. At the time of the Kingdom, the Iraqi education system was modelled on the British system of that time. Major colleges taught courses using books used at the British universities. The national Baccalaureate examination was based on the British national exam. That is why Iraqi students never had serious problems during their academic studies in foreign countries.

Now all that has been undermined by the Ba'athist approach to education. There is therefore a dual challenge for a renewed Education system in Iraq.

The first challenge for a post-conflict democratic Iraq is to rid the education system of the pernicious proselytising by the Ba'ath Party regime of their weird concepts of nationalism and subjection to the regime which are currently instilled in primary and secondary school students – and the requirement that for the most part only members of the Ba'ath party can go on to higher education.

Secondly, the technical institutes and the universities of Iraq are for the most part still accepted internationally for the quality and rigour of their academic and technical training standards. However, in a post-Saddam Iraq there is a special opportunity to upgrade and enhance the system of education so that the talents of the people of Iraq can best be realised for the benefit of all citizens and correct the low level of English among students which now prevails, forcing them to sit for international tests such as the IELTS.

In general

- Entry to university courses must be on the basis of academic merit only. There must be an explicit ban on any social qualification such as membership of a political party, relationship to a party of government leader, to being only an Arab national and certainly a ban on membership of a particular family or tribe or a particular religion or a particular ethnicity being required for entry to any tertiary institution which receives taxpayers funds.

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- The Parliaments of the States or the Federal territory must elect the senior members of the ruling Councils of the universities and technical institutes in their territories. The candidates should be nominated by other members of the Council on the advice of the academic staff of each institution. The Deans of each faculty, school or college of an institution must be selected by the Council of the institution only on the basis of elections among academic staff. Only in such a manner can academic freedom and merit be fostered and preserved.
- Members of Councils and Deans of faculties or schools must further be required to take an oath to serve only the interests of the university or institute, the school and its students and the nation without regard for race, sect or personal relationships.
- Each State and if necessary the Federal territory shall set up an expert Higher Education Commission to register current universities and technical institutes and any new ones that may be established. It will be the responsibility of the federal government to maintain a flow of funds for these institutes and universities, sufficient for them to pay staff salaries and provide all necessar facilities for students.
- All tuition at universities and technical institutes shall be absolutely free to the students and their families who win places at the institution's courses on the basis of merit.

In addition, at the Post Secondary and University level -

- Where post secondary or tertiary institutions are set up by any particular ethnic or religious group, there must be an adherence required for the registration of such schools or institutions to the offering of a common core of secular courses which will be tested by an independent set of examinations or tests set by State Higher Education Commissions or professional bodies.
- It must be a condition of State registration and/or Federal funding that ALL degree or diploma or certificate courses must comprise a set of core required subject units plus elective subject-units from which students may choose to suit their interests and needs, so enabling them to acquire a major specialisation and recognition of another "minor" area of study which can be later built up into another degree.
- However, for the first 10 years of Iraq's new system, the Universities must prepare students for public administration work, by offering subject units about the development and analysis of democratic thought, democratic constitutions and democratic processes in countries and political systems around the world as well as acquainting them in depth with the chosen Iraqi model.

- There shall also be set up an independent Federal Higher Education Accreditation body comprised of a majority of academics and leading professional persons to accredit all current and future courses (including post-graduate courses) leading to the award of diplomas or degrees.
- The accreditation process will be on the basis of publicly-announced national standards based on a course's ability to deliver up-to-date academic knowledge and the social/ professional application of that knowledge through modern teaching approaches. The body shall publish a list of all courses it has accredited each year before the start of the academic year to inform potential students adequately. No non-accredited course can receive Federal government funding.

At the Primary and Secondary School level

- Every State shall appoint an independent expert Education Commission to take over existing secondary schools and operate them, recruit teachers on the basis of merit and qualifications only and to prepare students at the high school level for a national Baccalaureate examinations. To eliminate the offering of pernicious private and expensive "cram" courses for Baccalaureate candidates, the State Education Commission shall also approve either technical institutes or private education providers to assist Baccalaureate candidate to prepare for the national examination at no cost to their families.
- The Federal government must provide an adequate flow of funds to each State's school system. It will therefore appoint an independent National Education Board of experts charged with the main task of reviewing the standards of secondary students compared with other developed countries and recommending to the State Education Commissions on additions or deletions to school curricula.
- In addition the National Education Board will set up and conduct the annual national Baccalaureate examinations for high school students in their final year and liaise with the State commissions and the universities on the syllabi for this examination.
- Independent schools will be encouraged to establish their institutions after being accredited and registered on the basis of special standards put forward by the National Education Board which shall also be required to approve the quality of teaching staff, facilities and courses.
- There must be complete academic and social freedom accorded to the teachers and administrations of all schools and institutions at all levels of the education system guided only by community needs and expectations, not by government or religious demands.

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- To that end there should be a dissolution then a complete restructuring of the Iraqi Union of Teachers so that it too becomes a series of State branches with a Federal executive. The Union shall be responsible in each State for the registering of teachers on the basis of prior experience and qualifications and with the development of new qualifications and/or refresher courses in close liaison with the faculties of education at universities. Party affiliation shall be explicitly banned as a qualification to be a teacher. The primary mandate of the Union must be to look after the professional standards and the interests of its teacher members and defend their needs and rights.
- The National Education Board will be given as an added responsibility the development of appropriate courses and activities that will engender in both primary and secondary school students an awareness, appreciation of and respect for human rights, citizens rights and multicultural diversity in the new democratic Iraq, particularly in the context of national aspirations and love of country in order to demonstrate the value to citizens of the establishment of international peace and order.
- The National Education Board will also take on the development of appropriate courses, as well, on the natural environment of Iraq and its wildlife and ecosystems and the need for sustainable human practices in agriculture, water management and waste disposal.
- This Board must further be provided with funds to develop high-quality audio-visual and digital aids by way of TV and multi-media programs to support these courses and other courses in the school curricula, for use in classrooms and in school theatres.
- The right to all levels of education must be completely free to all citizens of Iraq. All children of primary and secondary school age must attend their local schools at no cost to parents. School-children must be provided with free public transport passes to enable them to attend schools. In regional centres the Education Commission must provide school bus services to bring children to and from schools.
- All elementary schools must also offer child-care/day care services and playgrounds to working parents on a free basis. All intermediate/high schools must be equipped with proper sports facilities such as a swimming pool and ovals for the adequate physical development of students.
- In addition all students at all levels – post secondary and tertiary students as well as school students - must be provided with free access to medical and dental care and medications, including regular diagnostic x-rays and other imaging services (such as CT scanning, ultrasound scanning and mammography). This will require the provision of some of these services through mobile medical units, especially for regional schools in outlying centres.

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- To ensure the appropriate nourishment at nutritious levels, school canteens must be set up at all primary and secondary schools to provide free milk and nourishing foods and vitamin supplements so as to combat malnutrition and the miserable levels of health that exist today among so many Iraqi children as a result of the regime's rotten schemes.
- To ensure the adequate intellectual development of students, all secondary schools must provide access to computers and to the Internet for students as well as high class library facilities as part of official encouragement for them to pursue their own academic and social research.
- To this end, secondary students should be required to undertake courses in spoken and written English in addition to their normal class instruction in Arabic. This should start as early as possible, perhaps even in kindergarten. This can be a milestone of Iraqi education by ensuring that students can utilise the Internet and keep up with foreign writers and their writings and readily peruse research books as well as keep up with the news of the day to build their general knowledge. Classes in other languages may, of course, be offered to all secondary students as an option.
- At the primary and secondary level, all schools will be required to give during each week of schooling at least two class periods of religious instruction in the religion of the students, as specified by parents. The classroom learning of only one religion to the exclusion of all others must be explicitly banned, either by constitutional or legislative provision.
- All children completing their Intermediate Year must be entitled to the award of a School Certificate without any formal examination. The 9th-grade intermediate examination systems has clearly become too confronting to students as well as serving no useful purpose. The award of a School Certificate to record their progress will suffice – and can be the primary means of their entry into courses offered by post-secondary Technical Institutes.
- All students going on to complete High School must sit for the Baccalaureate examination, which shall reflect achievement at a national examination and be the primary means of assessment for entry into university courses.
- All elementary and secondary schools will be required to foster the establishment of special parent societies so that parents of schoolchildren can join in cooperation with teachers and administrators in understanding and appreciating the benefits of the enhancement of their local schools for the welfare of all students and their community as well as their country.
- In addition primary and secondary schools must encourage their students to experience their country, its rich history and the varied cultures and scenic attractions of its various regions by preparing special school excursions and vacation trips.

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- All primary, secondary, post-secondary and university school years shall follow the same academic year according to international standards and comprising, say two or three semesters a year with adequate vacation breaks.
- Governments may request of the independent Education Commissions in their state or in the federal territory, the development and offering of courses to meet the specific requirements of their communities for their technical or social enhancement. But NO government is be permitted to have any direct say in the actual curriculum or the teaching of such courses.
- States should also establish special selective schools for the more talented of their students who can be chosen for such schools at the end of Year 6 at primary School. These special schools can offer more challenging and more demanding courses to ensure the students achieve their full potential.
- Teachers at all levels, primary, secondary post secondary and tertiary will be selected and appointed ONLY on the basis of merit through having been accredited by the restructured Iraqi teachers Union. There shall be absolutely no discrimination against teachers on ethic, religious or other discriminatory grounds.

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