

LEBANON FIVE-YEAR HIGHER EDUCATION PLAN, 2023-2027

30 September 2022

Table of Contents

Abbreviations and Glossary	5
Foreword	8
Acknowledgements	11
Executive Summary	12
Chapter 1. Introduction	19
1.1 Importance of Higher Education	19
1.2 Key Policy Documents and Legislation	20
1.3 Structure of the 5-Year Plan	23
Chapter 2. Situation Analysis	28
2.1 Overview of the Higher Education Environment	28
2.2 The Social and Economic Context for Lebanese Higher Education	28
2.3 Lebanese Higher Education System	33
2.4 Elements of Strength in the Higher Education System	34
2.5 Priority Challenges for the Higher Education System	35
Chapter 3. Vision, Strategic Objectives and Action Plan	37
3.1 Vision for Higher Education in Lebanon	37
3.2 Strategic Objectives for Higher Education in Lebanon	38
3.3 Priority Areas and Programme Actions	39
Strategic Pillar 1: Steering the Higher Education System	44
Chapter 4.	45
Priority Area 1: Strengthen Governance and Accountability	45
4.1 Why governance Matters	45
4.2 Current Governance and Regulatory Structure in Lebanon	47
4.3 An Integrated and Differentiated Post-Secondary Education System	50
4.4 Institutional Governance	51
4.5 Programme Actions	52
Chapter 5.	58
Priority Area 2: Enhance Quality and Quality Assurance	58
5.1 Why Quality Assurance Matters for Lebanon	58
5.2 Overview of Quality and Quality Assurance Practice in Lebanon	59
5.3 Programme Actions	62
Chapter 6.	71
Priority Area 3: Increase Funding and Monitor Performance	71

6.1	International Approaches to Financing Higher Education	71
6.2	Higher Education Financing in Lebanon Current Position and Proposed Reforms	74
6.3	Programme Actions	76
Chapter 7.		80
Priority Area 4: Higher Education Information and Data		80
7.1	Why HE Information and Data Systems Matter	80
7.2	Overview of Higher Education Information and Data in Lebanon	81
7.3	Programme Actions	82
Strategic Pillar 2: Improving Relevance and Quality Outcomes		86
Chapter 8.		87
Priority Area 5: Education, Skills and Relevance		87
8.1	Strengthening the Quality and Relevance of Higher Education	87
8.2	Overview of Education and Training Provision in Lebanon	88
8.3	Programme Actions	91
Chapter 9.		94
Priority Area 6: University-based Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI)		94
9.1	Importance of University-based Research for Knowledge and Society	94
9.2	Observations on the Lebanese University-based Research System	95
9.3	Programme Actions	97
Chapter 10.		94
Priority Area 7: Doctoral Education		99
10.1	Programme Actions	97
Chapter 11.		102
Priority Area 8: Teaching and Learning		102
11.1	Programme Actions	102
Strategic Pillar 3: Strengthening Social Responsibility and Competitiveness		104
Chapter 12.		105
Priority Area 9: Service-to-Society and Civic Engagement		105
12.1	Role and Responsibilities of Higher Education	105
12.2	Engagement in Lebanon	106
12.3	Programme Actions	107
Chapter 13.		109
Priority Area 10: Internationalisation and Strategic Partnerships		109
13.1	Internationalisation of Higher Education	109

13.2	Internationalisation, Global Partnerships and Rankings in Lebanon	110
13.3	Programme Actions	111
Chapter 14.		109
Priority Area 11: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)		115
14.1	Programme Actions	115
Appendix 1. International Quality Assurance Best Practice		117
Appendix 2. Basic Principles of a Quality Assurance Framework for Lebanon		119
Appendix 3. Consultations		121

Tables and Figures

Tables:

Table 1	Overview of 5-year Higher Education plan	13
Table 2	Distribution of students according to gender and nationalities	33
Table 3	Strategic objectives for Higher Education in Lebanon	38
Table 4	Overview of priority area 1 programmes	52
Table 5	Overview of priority area 2 programmes	63
Table 6	Features of a “good” Higher Education funding model	73
Table 7	Overview of priority area 3 programmes	76
Table 8	Overview of priority area 4 programmes	82
Table 9	Overview of priority area 5 programmes	91
Table 10	Overview of priority area 6 programmes	97
Table 11	Overview of priority area 7 programmes	99
Table 12	Overview of priority area 8 programmes	102
Table 13	Overview of priority area 9 programmes	108
Table 14	Overview of priority area 10 programmes	111
Table 15	Overview of priority area 11 programmes	115

Figures:

Figure 1	Higher Education at the centre of a complex knowledge research innovation eco-system	19
Figure 2	Demographic pyramid 2020	29
Figure 3	Governance of the Lebanese Higher Education as per law 285/2014	50
Figure 4	New governance and regulatory structure for Lebanon	53

Abbreviations and Glossary

AACP – Australian Association of Consultant Pharmacy
AACSB – Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
AASBI – Association of Accredited Schools of Business International INTERNATIONAL
AAQ – Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance
ABET – Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, USA
ACEND – Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, USA
ACPE – Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education
ACPHA – Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration
ACQUIN – Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
ADA – American Dental Association, USA
ADEE – Association for Dental Education in Europe
ALESCO – Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
ANQAHE – Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
AUF – Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie
CAPTE – Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education, USA
CASN – Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing
CCAPP – California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals
CDE – Council for Doctorate Education
CEDRE – Programme Cedre, LNCSR/CNRS
CEPH – Council on Education for Public Health, USA
CHE – Council of Higher Education
CCNE – Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, USA
CoE – Centres of Excellence
COIL – Collaborative online international learning
COM – Communication from the Council of Ministers, European Union
CNRS/NCSR – National Council for Scientific Research
CRDP – Education Center for Research and Development
DAA – Accreditation of Dietetics Education Programmes, Australia
DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service
DGHE – Director General of Higher Education
ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

EDI – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

EFMD – European Foundation of Management Development

ENIC-NARIC – European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centres are a joint initiative of the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO

EU – European Union

EUA – European Universities Association

EUR-ACE – Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation of Engineering Programmes (EAFSG)

EVALAG – Evaluation Agency of Baden-Württemberg

EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

FIBAA – Foundation for International Business Administration and Accreditation

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

H2020 – Horizon 2020, European Union Research Framework Programme, 2014-2020, succeeded by Horizon Europe, 2021-2027

HCERES – High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education, France

HE – Higher Education

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HEMIS – Higher Education Management Information System

HERE – Higher Education Reform Experts

IAA – International Accrediting Authority, USA

IACBE – International Accreditation Council for Business Education, USA

IEP – Institutional Evaluation Programme

LAAB – Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board, USA

LBP – Lebanese Pound is the national Lebanese currency

Learners – a broader term to include students of all ages and situations

LHE – Lebanese Higher Education

LQAA – Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency

LQF – Lebanese Qualifications Framework

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

MOOC – Massive Open Online Courses

MSCHE – Middle States Commission on Higher Education

NAAB – National Architectural Accrediting Board, USA

NASAD – National Association of Schools of Art and Design, USA

NECHE – North East Commission on Higher Education

NCSR/CNRS – National Council for Scientific Research

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OER – Open Educational Resources

PBF – Performance based funding

PIC – Policy Implementation Committee

Programme – Set of activities that aim at achieving a set of results

QA – Quality Assurance

QF – Qualifications Framework

RDI – University-based Research, development and innovation

RIBA – Royal Institute of British Architects

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SME – Small and Medium Enterprises

SRS – Student record system

TEPDAD – Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Medical Education Programs

Tertiary – Post-compulsory or post-secondary systems. It usually refers to academic education (university) but also includes advanced vocational or professional education (VET/TVET)

UKAF – UK Akkreditering Forum Limited

UNESCO – United National Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNHCR – United Nation Refugee Agency

UNRWA – United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the near east

USR – University social responsibility

University – refers to all HEIs undertaking research and awarding higher degrees, irrespective of their name and status in national law

VET/TVET – Vocational education and training; Technical and vocational education and training

WB – World Bank

Foreword

The five-year plan for higher education 2023-2027 is the culmination of a long process of reflection, debate and consultation to save and restore the Lebanese educational system. It benefits from the full support of the government and, in particular, the President of the Council of Ministers Mr. Najib MIKATI who is convinced that the coming reforms of higher education must contribute to the recovery of the country, expresses his most absolute determination to reach the strategic objectives and pledges that the government will spare no effort to accompany the necessary transformations.

The achievement of this plan requires an unwavering commitment to our schools and universities, according to a systemic and holistic approach ranging from school to employability.

Indeed, Lebanon has always held, historically, a privileged position in the region and throughout the world, given the quality of its higher education sector. Through this plan, and in very critical moments of its existence, it embodies its will to maintain this position. For this reason, we have all agreed to explore, all together, the hard paths to take, to face the crisis and its repercussions.

Today, no one can pretend that this crisis that has befallen us is ephemeral or limited to financial, economic, or political dimensions. This crisis is existential because it endangers our university system, which has long been recognized as a source of grey matter that has built the country's image and identity over the years. Let's be honest, some of our system's failures are prior to the crisis, exacerbated by the latter, and others are generated and triggered by the shock of the country caused by the crises that occurred in recent years. The question we must ask is therefore in three parts:

- How to stabilize the educational system to avoid its generalized collapse in the short term?
- How can we lay the foundations for a sustainable recovery in the medium term?
- How do we ensure sustainability, excellence, and outreach in the long term?

Our main concern is to overcome the dilemma that haunts the entire educational community: adapting between managing the crisis and looking to the future.

It is thus, after the alarming report and the fundamental interrogations, that comes the time of reflection around the major challenges of our university system, such as the quality of the training or the adequacy of the formations with the needs of the country. The difficulties that hinder the proper functioning of universities and research centers and consequently reduce, unfortunately, the ambition to mere survival are now well known, both by the Ministry and the world of universities and by our international partners who are fully aware of the magnitude and extent of these constraints that drain our energy and undermine our strengths. In the face of these difficulties, and without expecting miracles, it is time to

federate our efforts to put in place a significant number of projects and establish a national educational rescue plan.

Thus, we are, citizens, decision-makers, leaders, academics and intellectuals, faced with a real challenge, that of waging the most imperative of battles, that of seizing this crisis to reconfigure a more resilient, more efficient, more competitive model, and most importantly, one that serves the national interest. To begin, we must develop an evolving educational strategy in order to reform and develop our education system at all levels.

Rethink the vision and mission of our universities in light of all changes, whether local or international, and in harmony with the economic, social, and cultural needs of the country: this is our target. In this regard, higher education institutions are called upon to channel their investments into the production of knowledge, into the diversification and quality of their training offer, and into new training programs that anticipate tomorrow's professions and skills, so as to be able to acquire an identity specificity and competitive advantages.

At the same time, we must work together, without respite, for a strict ethic that will immunize us against the scourge of the commodification of the university and the university degree, and to limit the impressive exodus of our academic and scientific lifeblood. I am confident that, through our will, our requirement, our creativity, and with our partners and friends of Lebanon, we can win all these battles and revive the hope of the Lebanese citizen in a better future.

Because the destiny of a country depends on the education of its people, I recall a quote from the Nobel Prize-winning writer François Mauriac, who said "we weave our destiny, we pull it out of us like a spider pulls its web". Lebanon deserves that we make the best of ourselves to weave a destiny that lives up to our expectations.

Abbas EL HALABI

Minister of Education and Higher Education

Acknowledgements

The report is based on interviews/consultations with a wide range of stakeholders from different Government ministries, higher education institutions and associations, business, civil society and international organisations, and students (see Appendix 3). It also entailed a review of policies and reports, including work undertaken by the National Erasmus+ Office in Lebanon.

We would like to acknowledge the support of Dr. Chafic Mokbel which was invaluable in the preparation of this policy document and in particular the preparation by him of the background document.

We would also like to acknowledge the feedback received from the Reading Committee, and the National Consultation Forum.

Executive Summary

Around the world, higher education is recognised as a major driver of social, cultural and economic development, providing human capital through education and training, attracting and retaining high-skilled talent and investment, playing a critical role in the knowledge-research-innovation eco-system and underpinning the global competitiveness of nations. No area of public policy or public life is unaffected by the quality, performance and outcomes of higher education.

The most recent strategy for the higher education sector in Lebanon was developed in 2007 as part of a global strategy for education in all its domains, including basic and general education. The strategy inspired many developments in higher education during the years that followed its development. As the years progressed new challenges appeared, some of which are global, and others are specific to the Lebanese contexts. It is timely now to set a new policy direction for Lebanese higher education.

This policy is set at a time of unprecedented challenge for the country - economically, socially and politically. The policy must address those challenges. But it also must take a longer-term view. The policy covers a five-year term but, in doing so, it also must set the groundwork for the years to follow.

The policy builds on the strengths of the system including the traditional high regard that Lebanese have for education and higher education, the quality in many of the universities with accreditation by respected international bodies, significant infrastructure on which to build a better system and a repeated demonstration of resilience in the sector in the face of crises.

But there are challenges over and above those caused by the current series of crises. These include weak regulation and particularly the absence of a national quality assurance system, a serious lack of alignment between the outcomes for graduates, their employment opportunities and the skills' need of Lebanon, leading to a serious problem of brain drain. The system is very fragmented with a poorly developed research capacity and a poorly developed digital infrastructure, well demonstrated by the recent pandemic.

Against this backdrop the following vision is set for the future higher education system.

Lebanon's higher education system will meet the needs of Lebanon by providing knowledge and learning of lasting social, economic and cultural significance, which is sustainable and internationally competitive.

Implementing this vision will lead to, among other elements, a high level of accountability from the universities to the people of Lebanon; universities playing a key role in nation building as a coherent and well-coordinated system of high-quality and diverse institutions; continuing respect for academic freedom and adherence to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 by the promotion of the values of equality, diversity and inclusion, student-centred learning, service-to-society and global citizenship.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the *5-Year Higher Education Plan*. There are three Strategic Pillars under which are listed the eleven Priority Areas and 44 Programmes. Of central importance are the proposals relating to governance and quality assurance. Without

a more effective governance and regulatory system, Lebanese higher education will not deliver the other reforms proposed in this policy or the outcomes that Lebanon needs from its universities. Likewise, unless an effective quality assurance system is put in place the higher education system cannot meet the diverse needs of Lebanese society or build the kind of reputation for quality outcomes that are so important to its graduates and the international standing of the country.

Many of the key programme actions proposed, e.g. the structure of the Directorate General for Higher Education and the LQAA, require legislative change. To date the history of such change is not encouraging as legislation remains for long periods, even years, in draft form. Accordingly, the policy proposes actions that can be taken to support the system in a transition period and leverage off its undoubted capacity for innovation and dynamism, as well as laying the groundwork for the enactment of the legislation. Alternative solutions may be available which require ministerial decision and actions.

Many more of the actions proposed require no legislative support and will depend upon an effective partnership effort between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the universities. Implementation of the policy will require support at political level, as well as a highly effective effort at administrative level. In this context it is proposed that a Director of Higher Education be appointed as matter of urgency; that the Directorate be provided with the staff and financial resources needed and that its work be supported in a transition period by a Policy Implementation Committee comprising Lebanese and international experts with the direction of the Director. An early requirement of this committee will be to develop a detailed plan for implementation, including timelines and costings where relevant.

Finally, it is important to note the following. The 5-Year Plan sets out policy objectives for the higher education system in Lebanon. The recommendations pertain to all the higher education institutions in Lebanon, public and private, because the objective is to create a single integrated system that meets the needs of Lebanon now and into the future. Specifics of each programme identified in the 5-Year Plan, e.g., external review of HEIs, the CHE, etc., require further detailed consideration and development by the PIC in association with the HEIs and relevant stakeholders.

Table 1. Overview of 5-Year Higher Education Plan.

<p>National Development Goal: Lebanon’s high-quality human capital strengthens socio-economic development, innovation, and resilience.</p>		
<p>Higher Education Development Vision: Lebanon’s Higher Education system will meet the needs of Lebanon by providing knowledge and learning of lasting social, economic and cultural significance, and which is sustainable and internationally competitive.</p>		
<p>STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: STEERING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM</p>	<p>STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: IMPROVING RELEVANCE AND QUALITY OUTCOMES</p>	<p>STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS</p>
<p>PRIORITY AREA 1: Strengthen Governance and Accountability.</p> <p>Establish an effective governance and accountability system for Lebanese Higher Education at national and institutional levels, setting out the legal norms and organisational arrangements for all key actors across the Lebanese HE system.</p>	<p>PRIORITY AREA 5: Education, Skills and Relevance.</p> <p>Put in place structures and processes to ensure that the Higher Education system, individual HEIs and education programmes contribute significantly to the skills needs of the Lebanese economy.</p>	<p>PRIORITY AREA 9: Service-to-Society and Civic Engagement.</p> <p>Make service-to-society and civic-engagement a requirement for all Higher Education Institutions in Lebanon.</p>
<p>Programme 1.1. Implement a new Governance Framework for Lebanon Higher Education System.</p>	<p>Programme 5.1. Establish a National Taskforce to review all programmes based on an exhaustive study of current degrees.</p>	<p>Programme 9.1. Develop a regulatory framework for involvement of Higher Education Institutions in society services and civic engagement.</p>
<p>Programme 1.2. Strengthen the role of the DGHE towards Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at the level of framing and organisation of Higher Education and at the level of controlling, following-up and monitoring.</p>	<p>Programme 5.2. Establish a Universities-Economic stakeholders Forum.</p>	

<p>Programme 1.3. Strengthen the role of the DGHE with respect to university-based research, and establishing cooperation and partnership between DGHE and LNCSR.</p>	<p>Programme 5.3. Establish a national system for academic and vocational guidance.</p>	
<p>Programme 1.4. Review the constitution of the Council for Higher Education as an intermediary body and its function and autonomy.</p>	<p>Programme 5.4. Establish a University/Institutional Research Unit.</p>	
<p>Programme 1.5. Establish Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA) (same as Programme 2.1).</p>		
<p>Programme 1.6. Review Law 285/2014 in order to develop and modernise the Lebanese Higher Education sector.</p>		
<p>Programme 1.7. Develop an integrated and diversified post-secondary education system.</p>		
<p>Programme 1.8. Review and modernise governance in HEIs in order to instore new governance arrangements in line with those implemented internationally.</p>		
<p>PRIORITY AREA 2: Enhance Quality and Quality Assurance.</p> <p>Develop an internationally recognised quality assurance system to assure the quality of the student experience and the outcomes from individual HEIs and collectively across the higher education system.</p>	<p>PRIORITY AREA 6: University-based Research, Development and Innovation (RDI).</p> <p>Develop a strong university-based research, development and innovation system at the national and institutional level.</p>	<p>PRIORITY AREA 10: Internationalisation and Strategic Partnerships.</p> <p>Strategically position Lebanon as a regional and international leader in higher education and research.</p>

Programme 2.1. Establish Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA)	Programme 6.1. Develop a National University-based Research Policy and Strategy supporting innovation and development.	Programme 10.1. Develop a national framework and regulations for internationalisation and global partnerships.
Programme 2.2. Develop and implement Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and regulations.	Programme 6.2. Establish National Centres of Excellence.	Programme 10.2. Each University to develop a university strategy for internationalisation and global partnership.
Programme 2.3. Establish Quality Assurance operational process.		Programme 10.3. Embrace the opportunities of digital internationalisation.
Programme 2.4. Establish Lebanese Register of Quality Assurance.		Programme 10.4. Put in place appropriate policies based on highest standards to protect the rights of international students and to ensure that they have a good learning experience in high quality provision.
Programme 2.5. Produce sector report on the Quality of Lebanese HE.		
Programme 2.6. Increase participation in International and Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE).		
Programme 2.7. Conduct External Review all HEIs in Lebanon.		
Programme 2.8. Develop and implement Lebanese Qualifications Framework (LQF).		
Programme 2.9. Establish sustainable system for continuous revision and development of Higher Education Qualifications in relation to job market.		
Programme 2.10. Establish process for Recognition of Professional Qualifications.		

Programme 2.11. Review and develop higher education programs based on the Quality Assurance Framework, the National Qualifications Framework and related procedures.		
Programme 2.12. Ratify Arab States Convention on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications and promote bilateral and multilateral conventions on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications and Diplomas.		
Programme 2.13. Join ENIC-NARIC Network.		
PRIORITY AREA 3: Increase Funding and Monitor Performance. Develop a policy approach to funding higher education in Lebanon along two dimensions – the immediate needs of the sector and a longer-term policy direction.	PRIORITY AREA 7: Doctoral Education. Develop a National Framework for Doctoral Education.	PRIORITY AREA 11: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Ensure equity of access to and participation in higher education, and that the values of EDI are mainstreamed.
Programme 3.1. Reform the funding model for the Lebanese University.	Programme 7.1. Develop a National Framework for Doctoral Education.	Programme 11.1. Set a framework and regulations to ensure equality and justice in terms of parity in equity of access, participation, diversity and inclusion.
Programme 3.2. Introduce a model of Performance Based Funding for the Lebanese University.	Programme 7.2. Develop a Research Cooperation Platform between the concerned Stakeholders, in particular between DGHE and LNCSR, and establish Collaborative Doctoral Schools.	
Programme 3.3. Establish a Strategic Fund for all Universities.		
Programme 3.4. Introduce measures to support the higher education system through the current crises.		

<p>PRIORITY AREA 4: Higher Education Information and Data.</p> <p>Develop a comprehensive higher education management information system (HEMIS) to foster informed decision-making processes.</p>	<p>PRIORITY 8: Teaching and Learning.</p> <p>Establish structures and processes for continual improvement of teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment.</p>	
<p>Programme 4.1. Develop the parameters and system architecture of a HEMIS system for Lebanon.</p>	<p>Programme 8.1. Establish Centres for Improvement and Development in Teaching and Learning in HE institutions.</p>	
<p>Programme 4.2. Develop a Student Record System (SRS).</p>		
<p>Programme 4.3. Develop and Implement a Graduate Outcomes Survey and an Employer Survey.</p>		
<p>Programme 4.4. Design and implement a platform to connect Higher Education to employment sector, to enhance labour market skills and employability, and to forecast skills for new and future jobs and professions.</p>		

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Importance of Higher Education

Globalisation and the knowledge economy, changing demographics and massification, technological progress and environmental developments, and changes in the labour market have combined to transform the role and responsibilities of higher education. In addition, higher education systems around the world have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, the rush to move teaching and learning on-line and to make changes to the way in which they undertake research and collaborate. These developments have placed digital transformation high on the list of challenges affecting higher education but also transforming the way in which people around the world live, work and socialise.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have deep historical roots in their country, and their cities and towns but their role in society is changing. Higher education is pivotal to national and regional vitality, driving innovation and training, attracting and retaining human capital. Quality is foremost for personal success as well as national competitiveness. Regardless of whether graduates live and work close to their home or are internationally mobile, they will increasingly operate as part of the global talent pool in an interconnected world. These different factors influence and shape higher education outcomes and the general performance and governance of the higher education system.

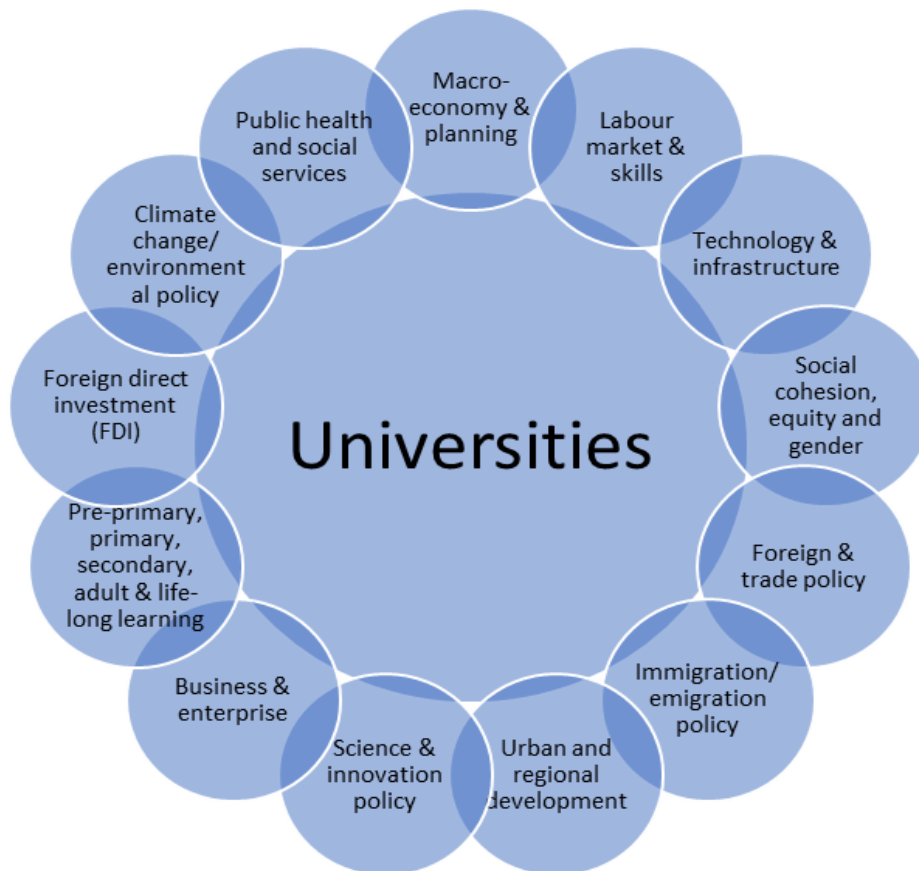
As such, higher education is recognised as a major driver of social, cultural and economic development, providing human capital through education and training, attracting and retaining high-skilled talent and investment, playing a critical role in the knowledge-research-innovation eco-system, underpinning the global competitiveness of nations and regions, and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4. No area of public policy or public life is unaffected by the quality, performance and outcomes of higher education.

Figure 1 illustrates the intersecting interests and interdependencies between higher education and all other public policy domains, which in different ways, can enable or inhibit the realisation of ambitions and objectives. As UNESCO states: “Higher education does not stand alone.”¹ Acknowledgement of this interconnectivity is evident in the SDGs which recognise and confront issues “in a holistic way” and transcend “administrative and territorial boundaries.”²

¹ UNESCO. (2010). Gender Issues in Higher Education. In *Advocacy Brief*. p2
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000189825>

² OECD. (2017b). *Future of work and skills. Paper presented at the 2nd Meeting of the G20 Employment Working Group*. p8. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Figure 1. Higher Education at the Centre of a Complex Knowledge-Research-Innovation Eco-System.



Source: Hazelkorn, 2019³

A key objective of higher education policy – and a measure of its success – is how well the higher education system overall, and its individual institutions, are able to meet societal objectives for: open and competitive education, offering the widest chance to the broadest number of students; a coherent portfolio of horizontally differentiated high performing and actively engaged institutions – providing a breadth of educational, research and student experiences; developing knowledge and skills that citizens need to contribute to society throughout their lives, attracting international talent; graduates able to succeed in the labour market, fuel and sustain personal, social and economic development; underpinning civil society; operating successfully in the global market, international in perspective and being responsive to change.

This broader context provides the background for the development and implementation of the *Lebanon 5-year Higher Education Plan*. The Plan is heavily influenced by the current situation in Lebanon, recent policy developments, and consultations with a wide group of stakeholders across government, higher education and wider Lebanese society.

³ Hazelkorn, E. (2019). *Relationships Between Higher Education and the Labour Market – A Review of Trends, Policies and Good Practices*. UNESCO Commissioned Study. China Funds-in-Trust Project Phase III. Paris.

1.2 Key policy documents and legislation

The latest strategy

The last strategy for the education sector in Lebanon was developed in 2007. The strategy inspired developments in higher education during the years that followed. In parallel, new challenges have appeared, some of which are global, and others are specific to the Lebanese contexts. Thus, there is a need for a new strategic plan. In Autumn 2021, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education with the support of UNESCO launched a project to define a new five-year strategic plan for the higher education sector.

The legislative framework

The legislative framework in Lebanon is divided into two domains: the public and the private higher education. The private higher education is regulated by the law 285/2014 that sets its objectives, its governing bodies, the criteria and procedures for licensing and monitoring, and the principles of management in private higher education institutions. The regulation of private higher education also depends on two other decrees. The decree 10068/2013 regulates the PhD programmes and the decree 2176/2018 defines the rules and procedures for licensing, starting-up and recognition of programmes. The Lebanese University, unique public higher education institution, is fully autonomous academically, administratively, and financially. It is organised according to the law 75/1967. The law 6/1970 regulates the work of its teaching staff. Its financial system was established in 1970 with the decree 14246. Research is nationally regulated by the National Council for Scientific Research (NCSR) that reports to the Prime Minister. The NCSR was established by the law 5/1962. Two main decrees support its regulation: 12765/1963 and 3219/1965. In addition, there are two draft laws in the parliament for more than a decade: the law for establishing the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency, and the law for defining the administrative structure of the directorate general of higher education. The legislative framework creates unnecessary separations between the different components of Lebanese Higher Education. It does not offer the tools and procedures for quality assurance and continuous development of the sector. There are no elements that guarantee the relevance of the programmes. The rules and procedures, when existing, do not distance the sector from political interference. The laws do not assure informed decision making and planning. Thus, it is important to conduct a review of the legislative framework taking into consideration the previous comments.

Adoption of SDGs

All the United Nations Member States adopted in 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a global shared call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity by 2030. In this context, the goal number 4 is directly related to education and higher education. It states: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Under this goal several objectives are enumerated including:

- 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

- 4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Vision for Lebanon's economy

In October 2017, the Council of Ministers issued the decree 13669/2017 approving setting a Vision for Lebanon's Economy, known as the McKinsey Report. This report identifies several challenges: "low" quality of education; outdated curriculum; high regional competition and, a skill' gap between labour force demand and supply. The report defines several aspirations. Regarding knowledge economy, the aspiration is formulated as: "To become a knowledge-driven digital nation, at the forefront of innovation, acting as a talent hub for technology, outsourcing, creative industries and education" with an objective of becoming an educational hub by 2025 and a world-class education hub by 2035. This is in line with the policy agenda published by the Association of Lebanese Industrialists under the title "2021 The Road to Recovery". The National Social Development Strategy of Lebanon set by the Ministry of Social Affairs for the period 2011-2021 calls for providing quality education and in particular: "Enhance interconnection between the labour market and university education". Among its recommendations are "institutionalise coordination between the Lebanese University and the labour market." It also stresses equity of access.

ALECSO recommendations

The Minister of Education and Higher Education participates in the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) conferences of the ministers in charge of higher education and scientific research in the Arab countries. In December 2009, the conference was held in Beirut under the title "Alignment between higher education outcomes and society needs in the Arab world". This conference resulted in a set of recommendations related to the establishment of national qualifications frameworks; the support of cooperation between the universities and their local communities; the establishment of national independent agencies for quality assurance and accreditation, and the preparation of cooperation programmes between the universities and Arab research institutions. This shows that quality and qualification frameworks were at the top of the agenda of the Lebanese decision makers for more than a decade.

National consultations

Two national surveys and consultations have been organised by the Tempus/Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) team in 2008 and 2014 respectively. The major outcomes can be summarised as:

Employability, developing the research culture and implementing a national quality assurance system appear as three major topics that are urgent to tackle

in Lebanese higher education. In addition, it seems important to rethink the model of financing higher education mainly based on tuition fees in private higher education institutions and public funds in the Lebanese University. The three major challenges are tightly related to the financial model in place and are interdependent. Lebanese Higher Education appears to be aware of modern tools in use in higher education. However, the application of such tools is being delayed although large efforts for awareness raising has been spent. The change and the adoption of new tools seem to be slow. Examples of such tools are diploma supplement, ECTS, and a national qualifications framework. University-Industry dialogue and e-Learning are examples of fields of interest where some actions need to start.

In addition to the global challenges affecting all societies, Lebanese Higher Education (LHE) has been facing a unique combination of major challenges. The present total collapse of the socio-politico-economic system in the country reshapes the context in which the LHE operates, making it an extremely challenging one. This puts the whole HE sectors at risk, a sector long considered as a flagship of the country and which has already been operating in survival mode over the past years – with implications for Lebanese society and the region.

1.3 Structure of the 5-year Plan

This *5-year Higher Education Plan* sets out a forward-looking roadmap to reform and strengthens the governance, quality, performance, productivity and competitiveness of the Lebanese higher education system. Chapter 2 describes the current challenges impacting on Lebanese higher education, followed by Chapter 3 which sets out the Vision and Strategic Objectives for the future.

Chapters 4 – 14 each discuss one or more of the eleven Priority Areas and associated actions. Each chapter follows a similar pattern, setting out a clear explanation of the issues and providing a response to the following questions:

- What are the key issues and what is international good practice?
- What is the current situation in Lebanon? What are the gaps between the current situation in Lebanon and international experience?
- What should Lebanon aim to achieve? What are the high-level recommendations and actions? What are the priorities, and how should the actions be sequenced in order to make progress towards the overall objective?

The following aspects form the basis for a comprehensive analysis of the higher education policy environment in Lebanon, the capacity and capability of the higher education system, and the education and training and research and innovation system in terms of the needs and demands of Lebanese society and economy. ⁴

⁴ OECD. (2017). Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance: Conceptual framework and data. In *OECD*. p66. <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/Benchmarking-Report.pdf>; Marmolejo, F. (2016). *What Matters Most for Tertiary Education: A Framework Paper* (No. 11). <https://doi.org/10.1596/26516>; Haddad, W. D., & Demsky, T. (1995). *Education policy-planning process: an*

- **Vision**

A vision for the higher education system should set out the country's aspirations and ambitions for the future, and identify the role and purpose of higher education in accomplishing those goals. What is the country seeking to achieve over the longer term in terms of meeting social, cultural and economic challenges over the coming decades, and meeting its roles of teaching and learning, university-based research, scholarship, and engagement with wider society? Alignment with SDG4 goal to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" should form an important aspect.

Having a strategic vision should influence policy, objectives and targets at a national governmental and institutional level. Overall, the vision should inspire all citizens, higher education institutions and learners of all ages – ensuring everyone has a common understanding of the importance of higher education to their future and the future of the country.

- **Regulatory Framework and Governance**

The regulatory framework should set out the legal norms and organisational arrangements for all key actors across the system. It should set out the central oversight role of the Ministry in monitoring governance practice across the system, the respective responsibilities of higher education institutions (HEIs) and the mechanisms in place to ensure good governance practice and accountability for public funding. It should set out guidelines by which public and private providers can operate. "A robust system of governance is vital in order to enable organisations to operate effectively and to discharge their responsibilities as regards transparency and accountability to those they serve."⁵

Governance arrangements include mechanisms to steer the system in order to ensure that individually and collectively HEIs are aligned with, and perform, according to the overall national vision and objectives. Different types of institutions are often classified according to their mission, and the role that they play within the higher education system, e.g. teaching-intensive, research-intensive, vocational, technical/technological, professional, as well as public, private not-for-profit, and for-profit.

The governance, leadership and professional capacity and capability are equally critical to ensuring that HEIs operate to the highest standard in a complex and changing higher education environment. It is vital to ensuring HEIs can offer education and training and conduct university-based research at an international level, and ensure graduates achieve high quality learning outcomes which are recognised in the country and internationally. Good institutional leadership is essential for ensuring that educational providers can manage their resources (human, physical, financial) efficiently and effectively; operate ethically, honestly,

applied framework. Paris: IIEP, UNESCO.

⁵ Code of Governance of Irish Universities 2012, Code of Governance of Institutes of Technology 2012, <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/governance/governance-framework-for-the-higher-education-system/>

equitably, fairly and transparently; and maintain quality assurance structures, policies and procedures across all aspects of their mission (education, research, service to society).

- **Quality**

The development of a quality assurance (QA) system is one of the most important aspects of higher education reform worldwide.⁶ It establishes a sense of accountability and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all providers of higher education. It provides assurance to government, students and graduates, future employers and society overall that the institutions and programmes of study, and their related support infrastructure, are of the highest standards. In addition to providing evidence of quality of a country and institution's qualifications, it can produce valuable information that can be used to enhance institutional effectiveness, and student performance and attainment. Quality assurance carries significant economic and reputational benefits for a country and its citizens.

- **Financing**

As society has matured, expectations about higher education and research have also grown. However, many systems face serious challenges maintaining their quality and relevance, increasing efficiency and effectiveness, strengthening societal impact, and securing equity across disciplines and staff and students in the field of higher education. GDP is used as an important international reference point and target for government expenditure but a country's capacity to provide or expand funding is dependent upon the national financial situation.⁷ The overall national ambition, participation rates, and the number and type of HEIs within a given country also influence the way in which resources are allocated and deployed.⁸ It is vital to ensure that all resources – financial, capital, human and natural – are managed well and used effectively, equitably and efficiently.

New higher education financing models are being developed in many countries in response to these challenges. A good funding model should be aligned with national objectives, and aim to promote sustainability (stability and continuity), legitimisation (fairness and transparency), and autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs).⁹ A combination of basic funding, performance funding and innovation-profile-oriented funding may be used.

- **Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS)**

⁶ Martin, M., & Uvalić-Trumbić, S. (2021). *A New Generation of External Quality Assurance. Dynamics of change and innovative approaches.*

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377497/PDF/377497eng.pdf.multi>

⁷ Analysis and Research Team. (2021). *Beyond GDP: Measuring What Matters.*

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49818/beyond-gdp-measuring-what-matters-issues-paper-19-may-2021-web.pdf>

⁸ OECD. (2020). *Resourcing Higher Education. Challenges, Choices and Consequences.* p44,

⁹World Bank. 2014. "Higher Education Financing in Latvia: Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses." Washington D.C. <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/media/3919/download>; p50-51.

Good strategic management of the HE system and institutions relies upon having a reliable management information system, overseen by the Government and utilised by all HEIs.¹⁰ HEMIS is a system for collecting, processing, analysing and reporting on data (qualitative and quantitative) about the higher education system. It provides a way for the government, the institutions and the public to track the overall performance of the system. In addition, it provides essential information for system steering, planning and management as well as decision making by HE leaders. Having a national system for graduate and employer feedback, and a process to track graduates is also important.

- **Education Programmes and Relevance**

Each HEI should set out a mission statement which describes its purpose, its values and what it does and its contribution or relevance to national vision and objectives. The mission statement influences the range of educational programmes offered (vocational, technical, professional, academic), qualification level (certificate, bachelor, masters, doctorate), mode of delivery (including collaborative, transnational and e-learning), as well as the learning experience and graduate outcomes. In the context of changing economic and labour market requirements and concerns about graduate employability, consideration should also be given to alignment between education programmes and demand. Accordingly, the way in which HEIs design, deliver and assess education programmes is an important focus of attention. This also includes consideration of work-based learning models, including internships, earn-and-learn models, competency-based and micro-credentials.

- **University-based Research, Development and Innovation (RDI)**

HEIs undertake research which is closely aligned with mission; teaching-oriented and research-oriented HEIs consider university-based research activity and the level of intensity differently. University-based research may be described in terms of basic/curiosity or applied/application oriented or aligned with the SDGs. Providing information about the amount and type of research, the type of outcomes (publications, policy, new products and services), and contribution, impact and benefit for society and the economy explains why university-based research is being undertaken. Information about how research activity is measured and evaluated is an important indicator of quality.

- **Internationalisation**

Higher education is international in terms of its educational benefits and across all its dimensions: teaching, research and service to society. It involves international students and staff attending the HEI, as well as going to other colleges and universities. It refers to cultural engagement and broadening learner experiences and understandings. While mobility has been an important part of internationalisation, there is increasing focus on

¹⁰ OECD. (2017). Conceptual framework for data collection for education statistics and indicators. In *OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264279889-5-en>

internationalisation-at-home and using digital/virtual learning environments to integrate an international, intercultural or global dimension into teaching and learning. Internationalisation is often used for branding and reputation.

- **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) aims to ensure fair treatment and opportunity to access and succeed in higher education, and for all students and staff in every area in which they work. It aims to eradicate prejudice and discrimination on the basis of an individual or group of individuals characteristics, e.g. socio-economic circumstances, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. SDG4 to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and SDG 5 to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” should form important aspects.¹¹ Diverse learning environments prepare students best for living and working in an increasingly multi-cultural and diverse society and diverse research environments. HEIs should also reflect the society in which they are based. Different countries have developed different types of policies, programmes and initiatives, including setting targets and criteria for enrolment of students and recruitment of staff, at national and institutional level.

¹¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Chapter 2. Situation Analysis

2.1 Overview of the Higher Education Environment

Internationally, universities are a major driver of social, cultural and economic development. They provide human capital through education and training – attracting and retaining high-skilled talent and investment. They play a critical role in the knowledge-research-innovation ecosystem, underpinning a country's global competitiveness at national and regional level and play a crucial role in addressing inequality in society. They generate new ideas, encourage critical thinking and foster creativity and leadership.

Skills, and consequently employment, are critical outcomes of a higher education system but they are not the only indicators of success, or of demand. Desire to participate in higher education is underwritten by the values of 21st century society and in turn reflects the aspirations for individual, family and community self-determination and eagerness to participate actively in local, national and global life. Economic growth and well-being reinforce each other. Good outcomes for individuals have positive impacts and benefits for family life, health, crime prevention, citizenship, civic engagement, social justice and public discourse. The benefits of higher education extend across society and are not restricted to people who are, or have been, students. Democratic societies require and are sustained by an engaged, well-informed citizenry.

As the world has become more globally integrated, higher education has become a global enterprise. Universities make a vital contribution to the future through their graduates, new and innovative ideas and discovery, and ongoing engagement with the wider community and public discourse. Higher education operates and benefits from an open global system in which boundaries are increasingly porous. This includes student, academic and professional mobility but also education and research programmes, global knowledge flows and networks and other internationalisation initiatives. The growth of the global and geopolitical significance of universities has been transformative in recent decades.

2.2 The Social and Economic Context for Lebanese Higher Education

The most recent strategy for the higher education sector in Lebanon was developed in 2007 as part of a global strategy for education in all its domains, including basic and general education. The strategy inspired many developments in higher education during the years that followed its development. As the years progressed new challenges appeared, some of which are global, and others are specific to the Lebanese contexts.

In particular, the socio-politico-economic crisis¹² now facing the country has added to previous complexity and to major challenges that need to be tackled in the next years or two, in the first instance, preserve Lebanese Higher Education long considered as a flagship of the

¹² World Bank, *Lebanon Economic Monitor*, Spring 2021, May 31, 2021: "The Lebanon financial and economic crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top three, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century."

country and then help it develop so that it can contribute strongly to social and economic development. It is against this backdrop that in Autumn 2021, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education with support from UNESCO published a draft five-year General Education Plan as the first stage in the development of a sector-wide education plan with a Higher Education Plan as next to be developed, and a TVET plan to follow at an appropriate time.

A research and analysis Background Paper on the socio-economic conditions in Lebanon and their implications for higher education is provided in an accompanying Annex. This section contains a summary of the key issues.

Demography

According to the World Bank data¹³, the total population in Lebanon in 2020 was 6,825,442. UNHCR and UNRWA have 914,648 Syrian and 476,033 Palestinian refugees registered^{14,15} by end 2019 respectively. There is also a strong outgoing flow of migration of Lebanese. Emigration has increased during the period 2015-2020, and this is particularly true for female citizens - an indicator of the emigration of full families. While emigration data for the latest months is not available, there is a strong shared belief that the emigration of Lebanese families has accelerated more recently. The high flow of migration in both directions creates an unstable profile of the population served by the higher education system. Refugees also have specific priority needs in basic education and social and economic support.

The age pyramid in Figure 2 of the Lebanese population in 2020 indicates that there is no immediate risk of a drop in potential demand for higher education. However, high emigration may affect the sector in the short term at two levels a measurable drop in the number of enrolled students and a change of the characteristics of students enrolling in higher education. In addition, the financial situation is affecting student's ability to participate fully. Because of the financial pressures on families there has been an understandable rise in demand for places at the publicly funded Lebanese University, and consequently a shift away from private universities.

Another factor in higher education participation is the level of completion at second level. A study published in 2020¹⁶ puts completion rates at 59% in lower secondary schools. As noted in the draft General Education Plan:

All data concur that completion rates have decreased over the past years as the result of increased poverty and vulnerability in the Lebanese and non-Lebanese population.

¹³ WB data for Lebanon, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/lebanon>

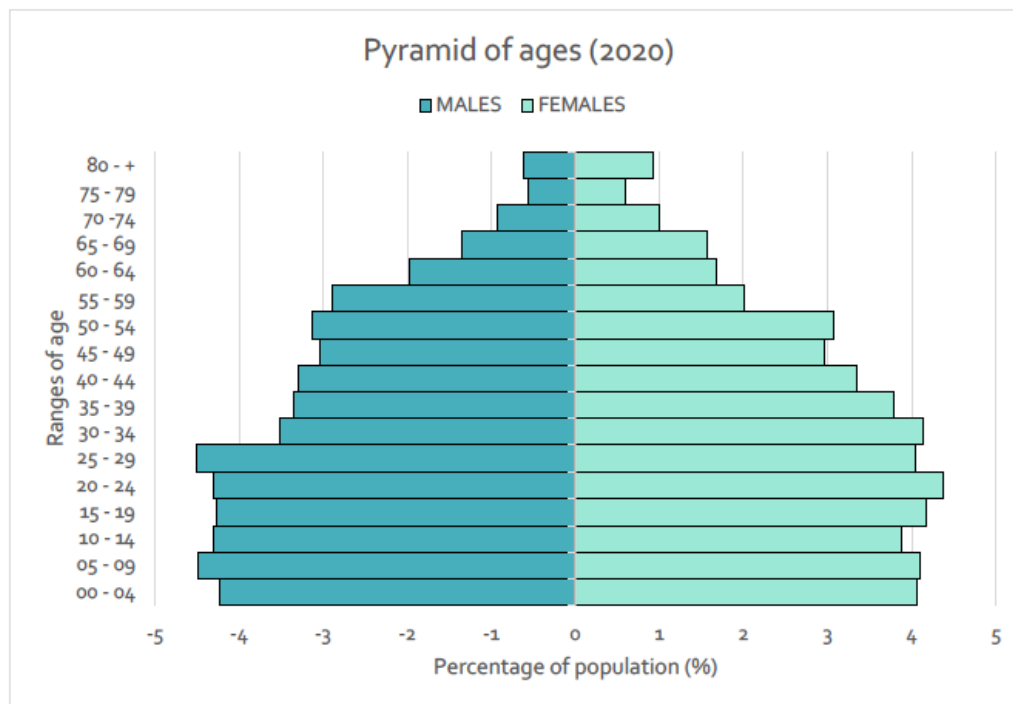
¹⁴ UNHCR (2020) Lebanon, <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2020/02/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-Fact-sheet-January-2020.pdf>

¹⁵ UNWRA (2019) Data on Refugees, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_in_figures_2020_eng_v2_final.pdf

¹⁶ Abdul-Hamid, Husein and Yassine, Mohamed (2020). *Political Economy of Education in Lebanon: Research for Results Program*. International Development in Focus; Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33369> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

Completion rates are also highly unequal among socio economic groups, with only half of 18-year-olds from the lowest economic quantiles completing secondary school (CASE 2020 cited in WB 2021).

Figure 2. Demographic Pyramid 2020.



Source: World Bank <https://databank.worldbank.org/>

In summary, the demographics clearly show a stability in the number of students coming out from the general education system as potential candidates to enrol in higher education. However, the socio-economic profile of the future students will change due to the high emigration rates and to the possible increasing demands from refugees. The current legislations restrict the employment of refugees to a few sectors in the Lebanese market. Moreover, broader refugees' groups need special support in terms of learning and acquiring transversal competences (linguistic, digital, human rights, etc.). The higher education sector needs to adapt its programmes to better accompany the expected transformations in the profile of the new students' cohorts and to better serve the learning needs of disadvantaged groups.

The Socio-Economic Situation

The high emigration flow from Lebanon is a result of the deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the country. The deterioration has been accumulating for more than a decade and has political, security and corruption elements. It led in October 2019 to a public uprising. This was followed by a drastic fall in the value of the Lebanese pound that has lost at least 90% of its value against the US Dollar. The situation was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and by the Beirut Port explosion in August 2020 and the subsequent investigation.

In 2020, the World Bank provided the following economic indicators:

● GDP (in current billions USD):	33.38
● Annual GDP growth:	-20.3%
● Inflation rate as percentage of GDP:	84.3%
● Exports of Goods and service as percentage of the GDP:	27%
● Imports Goods and services as percentage of the GDP:	45%
● Net borrowing as percentage of the GDP:	-11.0%
● Services, value added as percentage of GDP:	86.4%
● Industry including construction, value added as percentage of GDP:	7.2%
● Manufacturing, value added as percentage of GDP:	2.7%
● Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added as percentage of GDP:	2.5%

These numbers clearly show the frailty and lack of resilience of the Lebanese economy, which is highly dependent on services.

These numbers show that the services' sector tends to become the unique sector offering value added economically and employment opportunities on the local labour market. This is clearly not in sync with the higher education programmes. The higher education sector needs to adapt its offers to better serve the needs of the present socio-economic context and to closely work with other partners from different sectors to balance the economy and its evolution to better productivity. Supporting the development of a knowledge-based economy would also serve several economic plans, such the one proposed in the McKinsey report. The huge gaps suggest strengthening lifelong learning and offering upskilling and reskilling programmes to the labour force which is subjected to major transformations in the world of work. A transparent orientation must be set to guide the students in their choices at early stages. The diversification of the learning offers appears essential both in the covered disciplines and the levels of studies introducing for example short programmes.

Migration and Flow of Remittances

The Lebanese economy exhibits a traditional dependence on remittances. The inflow remittances share of the national GDP increased dramatically from 12.7% in 2018 to 32.9% in 2020 when more than a third of Lebanese GDP arose from remittances. The level of remittances and the associated emigration and Lebanese diaspora are factors to be taken into consideration by a strategic plan for Lebanese higher education. Graduates need to remain competitive in the international labour market to continue ensuring this crucial share of the GDP, at least until the economic situation stabilises and begins to develop so as to retain graduates and attract emigrants back to Lebanon. A critical trade-off needs to be found between aligning the offers to meet the local needs and transformations while providing the graduates with needed competences to remain competitive globally. This trade-off may not be found at the level of each programme but sought in the global offer by the whole sector.

Labour Market and Employability

The labour force in Lebanon, as estimated by the World bank, is 2.32 million persons. In 2019 the percentage of females in the total labour force was estimated at 24.46%, a ratio that is broadly constant over the past decade. The World Bank data distinguish eight segments in the labour market: Agriculture; Industry; Services; Family workers; Self-employed; Employers; Wage and salaried workers; Vulnerable employment.

While the labour force showed a constant increase for a number of years, the increase slowed in 2019 and a decrease was observed in 2020, confirming the previous observations regarding emigration. The general trend in the labour market seems to be a decrease in the volumes of all the listed employment segments to the advantage of a high increase in services. This almost complete dependence on services underlines the precarious nature of the labour market.

There are two further elements of the labour market of special significance for higher education. The first is that there is a deep-rooted problem of youth unemployment. Over the past decade, the youth unemployment rate has remained at nearly three times the overall national unemployment rate. In addition, unemployment rates by level of education are noteworthy. Those with basic education appear to be less at risk of unemployment than those with intermediate education, or higher education for whom the risk is highest. This clearly indicates the level of misalignment between labour market demand and the outcomes in terms of graduate skills from higher education. The Lebanese economy in its present status, and as it was deteriorating for more than a decade, does not provide a supportive environment for highly qualified graduates, who seem to be overqualified, or inappropriately qualified, for the demands in the local market.

The major economic trend to a services-based economy and labour market, as well as the increase of the risk of unemployment by advancing in higher education combined with high youth unemployment, do not serve the purpose of developing a knowledge-based society. An in-depth dialogue with employers and other stakeholders at national level is crucial to cope with these major educational, economic and labour market challenges.

Integrated postsecondary education

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a separate stream of post-secondary education with bridges to higher education. VET and technical education are generally undervalued by Lebanese society where there is a strong focus on higher education, and particularly the high-value professions, as a path towards personal success. This perspective is not consistent with the current Lebanese economic model where there is a preponderance of SMEs and where many positions requiring technical skills (e.g. in engineering) are filled by non-Lebanese workers. In this context, there is clear need for a synergy between traditional higher education and vocational education and training as a first step towards an integrated postsecondary education. The local market needs for VET graduates is confronted by (1) the low social value of VET education and (2) the need for specific skills that may not be available in the present VET programmes. This offers room for the development of short technical and technological programmes within higher education in cooperation with the VET sector. This cooperation should increase the social value of technical education and upgrade the offer taking into consideration the local needs.

2.3 Lebanese Higher Education System

The Lebanese higher education system comprises:

- 1 public university; the Lebanese University
- 50 private institutions¹⁷ - 36 universities, 9 university colleges and faculties, 3 theology colleges and 2 institutions that have acquired a license and did not start their activities.

The Lebanese University is under the authority of the Ministry that provides public finance but enjoys total independence and autonomy. The Lebanese University is the only public university in Lebanon and is formed of 19 faculties and schools. A faculty may have up to six geographical branches.

The private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are supervised by the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE) and depend mainly on tuition fees for their finance. Law 285/2014 governs and regulates private higher education, defining:

- The objectives of higher education, its institutions, its programmes and degrees;
- The governing bodies of private higher education;
- The licensing of new institutions and programmes;
- The monitoring, auditing, and recognition of institutions;
- The management of private higher education institutions.

Law 285/2014 also provides for the governing structure for higher education and this is further elaborated on in articles 4, 5 and 6 of the law.

The Background Paper (provided as a companion document to this policy) sets out the date of establishment and the number of students per higher education institution and the level of education provided. It is noteworthy that two thirds of the current 48 active institutions have been established since 1990 with 44% created in the decade after 1990. Table 2 below provides the distribution of students across the HEIs including their gender and nationalities for the academic year 2019-2020. Although the system comprises 48 active institutions 80% of the students are enrolled in only 10 universities, with the Lebanese University enrolling 36%. The high number of universities and other higher education institutions and the distribution of students indicate a high level of fragmentation of the higher education sector. The present socio-economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted higher education in the country. The emigration rate has increased. Unfortunately, there are no data available for the past year. According to the background analysis performed, the data provided by the CRDP are not conclusive regarding the change in the number of students enrolled in higher education. The increase in the total number of students has slowed down in 2020. The number of students enrolled in the Lebanese University has also decreased in 2020 suggesting a slight shift from the public to the private sector. Statistics from a sample of six universities¹⁸ indicate that full-time faculty members are leaving their universities with a rate varying in a range of 20% to 30%.

Table 2. Distribution of students* according to gender and nationalities.

¹⁷ According to: www.higher-edu.gov.lb/arabic/privuniv/personal_univ.html

¹⁸ Data are provided by the Directorate General of Higher Education in 2021

	Gender		Nationality		Total
	Female	Male	Lebanese	Non-Lebanese	
Lebanese University	56,059	23,266	75,732	3,593	79,325 (36%)
Private HEIs	66,122	76,617	123,438	19,301	142,739 (64%)
Total	122,181 (55%)	99,883 (45%)	199,170 (90%)	22,894 (10%)	222,064

* Academic year 2019-2020.

The geographical distribution of the Lebanese universities and their campuses is provided in Appendix B in the Background Paper. Lebanon has been divided into 5 main regions: Grand Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon, Bekaa, South Lebanon. The majority of the universities are in Grand Beirut and Mount Lebanon. However, there is considerable provision in the other regions. It is also important to note the large number of non-main campuses. The multiplication of campuses increases the fragmentation effect.

2.4 Elements of Strength in the Higher Education System

The policy plan described in the present paper is built on the many elements of strength within the Lebanese higher education. Some of them are indicated here:

- **A tradition of higher education.** Education and higher education are a tradition in Lebanese society. A number of institutions have been established since the second half of the nineteenth century and a few others started in the early of the twentieth century. These universities have attracted students from all the region and their graduates are in senior positions in different institutions, corporations and organisations.
- **A competitive environment.** Traditionally, Lebanese Higher Education is a competitive sector. This competition has resulted in a constant search for higher quality and for maintaining state of the art levels of performance and outcomes.
- **A strong international dimension.** A strong international and regional dimension exists connecting the HEIs and faculty members to peer institutions and faculty members. The strong international dimension is also present in the alumni of several institutions who are professionally located outside the country. It is further reflected in the participation in international university-based research and education programmes and projects.
- **Accreditation and quality assurance reviews by international agencies.** Several institutions have acquired accreditation from well-known and reputable agencies either at the institutional level and/or for different academic programmes.
- **A significant infrastructure.** Before the current Lebanese crisis several institutions were developing both education and university-based research infrastructures (laboratories, libraries, centres, etc.). These infrastructures and facilities remain as an asset for the sector and can be wisely used to overcome the obstacles created by the crisis.

- **Resilience.** The long Lebanese history in higher education and the consecutive crises has allowed the sector to develop some resilience. Some institutions continue to maintain their levels of activities due to endowments placed from outside Lebanon. External indirect support continues to be provided to several institutions in the form of scholarships¹⁹ or as funded projects²⁰. While several highly qualified faculty members have emigrated, a significant number of them remain in their institutions. They hold qualifications from international prestigious institutions and have accumulated expertise in their discipline whose value remains unchanged due to the crisis.

2.5 Priority Challenges for the Higher Education System

There are several challenges impacting on the quality and performance of the higher education system in Lebanon, and for the benefit of Lebanese society, its economy and its standing internationally. They include:

- **The present crisis.** The most immediate challenge facing higher education in Lebanon is the concurrent crises in the economy, political instability, the pandemic and the fuel and electricity supply. Apart from the operational difficulties, the crises have placed severe constraints on families to fund higher education and on students who in the current pandemic need reliable electricity supply to access programmes on-line, and critically on the education and research functions of the universities. Salaries have been reduced significantly, contributing to low morale, teachers and researchers participation and encouraging emigration of talent (students/graduates and academics).
- **Ineffective regulation.** The system of regulation of the sector is ineffective, with a lack of clarity on the role of the Ministry and inadequate governance structures in many institutions. The law 285/2014 stresses the representativity in the sector governance but does not provide sufficient administrative support. The administrative structure at the directorate general for higher education is weak. With the lack of precise data the decision making in the Ministry may not be well informed. The tools used by the different committees need to be upgraded. As a result, incidents harming the reputation of the sector are becoming frequent. Thus, there is an urgent need to reconsider the regulation of the sector by defining a clear administrative architecture with clear respective roles and precise separation of responsibilities. It is also important to distance the administrative tasks from political influences and to arrange for collecting relevant data to inform the decision-making process.
- **Absence of a national QA system.** There are no national quality assurance processes and while some universities have been accredited by well-regarded accreditors outside the country and/or have developed their own internal QA processes, they are in the minority.

¹⁹ For example, USAID scholarships programme

²⁰ Including Erasmus+ and H2020 programmes

- **Emigration of talent.** There is anecdotal evidence of significant numbers of highly qualified academics leaving Lebanon to take up posts in the region and wider afield. This is said to be driven by the economic crisis, the weakness of the Lebanese pound and the resulting low level of pay from Lebanese universities.
- **Poor alignment with economic/social needs.** The higher education system is heavily focused on preparing students for employment in the global labour market because of the country's reliance on remittances and very poor alignment between the outcomes of the higher education system and the social and economic needs of Lebanon, leading to a significant emigration of qualified graduates and high unemployment among those who remain in the country.
- **A fragmented sector.** The system is very fragmented with 48 active institutions but 10 institutions accounting for 80% of enrolled students. This is a fairly recent development since prior to 1990 Lebanon had only 18 HEIs. This fragmentation does not serve the interests of efficiency and optimal use of limited resources. This situation is made worse with the current economic situation. Fragmentation of higher education also reduces the impact of the Lebanese universities on developing social cohesion and dialogue among students from different social, regional, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.
- **Weak funding model.** While acknowledging that the current economic crisis presents particular financial problems for higher education as well as for all of Lebanese society, the sector requires a long-term funding policy to cover the Lebanese University and the private universities.
- **Under-developed research system.** University-based research activities need to be further developed and focused. Most of the research outcomes are produced by less than 10 universities. The support for university-based research is minimal and there is no strong socio-economic framework for supporting and developing research, development and innovation or national/international collaboration.
- **Insufficient infrastructure.** While the rapid and constructive reaction of the higher education system to the pandemic can be qualified as satisfactory and accelerating the digital transformation, it is important to note the need to improve the digital infrastructure. Improvements are needed at the various levels of education. The digital access can be described as insufficient for a large share of learners. The digital content and resources are also limited and not shared. Efficiency can be largely improved if the sector succeeds in sharing resources and contents. Efforts are also needed at the regulation and support levels. These developments need to be in accordance with the vision of a knowledge-driven digital nation.

Chapter 3. Vision, Strategic Objectives and Action Plan

3.1 Vision for Higher Education in Lebanon

Lebanon stands at an important historic juncture facing many challenges. Higher education has a critical role to play in helping the country to successfully meet these many social and economic challenges, and meet its key roles of teaching and learning, research, scholarship, and engagement with wider society. The National Development Goal for Lebanon states:²¹

Lebanon’s high-quality human capital strengthens socio-economic development, innovation, and resilience.

To support the country in achieving this goal, the high-level vision for Lebanese higher education is:

Lebanon’s higher education system will meet the needs of Lebanon by providing knowledge and learning of lasting social, economic and cultural significance, which is sustainable and internationally competitive.

To achieve this ambitious vision and building on Lebanon’s historic strength in education, its rich and diverse cultural heritage and its young and dynamic population, Lebanon will have a higher education system that:

- Plays a central role in building the nation, binding the diverse views and perspectives of its peoples into a coherent sense of what it is to be Lebanese in a stable democratic society;
- Through an effective system of governance and regulation, free of undue influence from the political system, is accountable to the people of Lebanon for its actions and outcomes;
- Plays a key role in making Lebanon a leader in higher education, research and innovation in its region and internationally;
- Creates a coherent higher education eco-system of high-quality, competitive, and diverse institutions that work collaboratively and responsibly with each other and in partnership with society;
- Provides human capital through education and training to create a knowledge-based society – retaining and attracting high-skilled talent and investment;
- Places learners at the centre of the higher education system, enabling them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to develop their full potential throughout their lives;
- Contributes actively and purposefully with Lebanese society, culture, the environment and the economy, generating new ideas, encouraging critical thinking and fostering

²¹ Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2021) *Lebanon five-year General Education Plan 2021-2025*. p13. Beirut.

creativity and leadership through its graduates, its staff (academic, research and professional), and in everything that it does;

- Has regard to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by promoting the values of equality, diversity and inclusion, student-centred learning, service-to-society and global citizenship;
- Respects the academic freedom of the institutions and their autonomy in managing their internal affairs, balanced by an effective system of accountability to Lebanese society.

3.2 Strategic Objectives for Higher Education in Lebanon

To achieve the vision for Lebanese higher education, three high level strategic objectives have been identified. Organised as pillars, each one aims to address the challenges affecting higher education. Each strategic pillar provides a clear set of reform measures which, taken together, will strengthen the overall higher education system, provide better quality outcomes for students and society, and ensure that higher education in Lebanon is both sustainable and internationally competitive. Each strategic pillar comprises specific priority action areas. There are eleven in total.

Table 3. Strategic Objectives for Higher Education in Lebanon.

Strategic Pillar 1. Steering the Higher Education System – Establish effective governance and accountability system for Lebanese Higher Education at national and institutional levels, setting out the legal norms and organisational arrangements for all key actors across the Lebanese HE system.
Strategic Pillar 2. Improving Relevance and Quality Outcomes – Put in place structures and processes to ensure that the higher education system, individual HEIs and education programmes contribute significantly to the skills needs of the Lebanese economy.
Strategic Pillar 3. Strengthening Social Responsibility and Competitiveness – Make service-to-society and civic-engagement a requirement for all higher education institutions in Lebanon.

Strategic Pillar 1. Steering the Higher Education System

Priority Area 1: Strengthen Governance and Accountability

Establish an effective governance and accountability system for Lebanese Higher Education at national and institutional levels, setting out the legal norms and organisational arrangements for all key actors across the Lebanese HE system.

Priority Area 2: Enhance Quality and Quality Assurance

Develop an internationally recognised quality assurance system to assure the quality of the student experience and the outcomes from individual HEIs and collectively across the higher education system.

Priority Area 3: Increase Funding and Monitor Performance

Develop a policy approach to funding higher education in Lebanon along two dimensions – the immediate needs of the sector and a longer-term policy direction.

Priority Area 4: Higher Education Information and Data

Develop a comprehensive higher education management information system (HEMIS) to foster informed decision-making processes.

Strategic Pillar 2. Improving Relevance and Quality Outcomes

Priority Area 5: Education, Skills and Relevance

Put in place structures and processes to ensure that the higher education system, individual HEIs and education programmes contribute significantly to the skills needs of the Lebanese economy.

Priority Area 6: University-based Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI)

Develop a strong university-based research, development and innovation system at the national and institutional level.

Priority Area 7: Doctoral Education

Develop a National Framework for Doctoral Education.

Priority Area 8: Teaching and Learning

Establish structures and processes for continual improvement of teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment.

Strategic Pillar 3. Strengthening Social Responsibility and Competitiveness

Priority Area 9: Service-to-Society and Civic Engagement

Make service-to-society and civic-engagement a requirement for all higher education institutions in Lebanon.

Priority Area 10: Internationalisation and Strategic Partnerships

Strategically position Lebanon as a regional and international leader in higher education and research.

Priority Area 11: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Ensure equity of access to and participation in higher education, and that the values of EDI are mainstreamed.

3.3 Priority Areas and Programme Actions

Each of the eleven priority areas consists of several programmes of activity which together provide an interconnected road-map to full implementation of the 5-year plan for Lebanese higher education. There is also a high level of interdependence between some of the priority areas and programmes – without which the overall plan will not succeed as intended. For example, the establishment of new governance structures and processes, and the

introduction of a quality assurance agency, policies and processes are an essential precondition for meeting all the other strategic objectives. In addition, some programmes are more complex than others.

The *5-Year Higher Education Plan* should be seen as an integrated plan and not as individualised actions. Yet no system of higher education can be expected to implement all priority areas and programmes simultaneously. Good project management, overseen by a designated project management team, will be essential to ensure that the full value and impact of the 5-year plan for Lebanese higher education is achieved. Ensuring success will be undertaken by the Policy Implementation Committee working with the DGHE.

This section explains why each of the strategic objectives has been chosen and identifies the intended outcome of the priority areas. Some of the priority areas – such as Priority Area 1 Governance and Accountability, and Priority Area 2 Quality and Quality Assurance – are more complex than others due to the challenges they address, and the requirement for legislative change. They are also the most important – their implementation unlocks the key to overall success. This explains also why these Priority Areas have more Programme Actions associated with them.

Table 1 above provides an overview of the *5-Year Higher Education Plan*. There are three Strategic Pillars under which are listed the eleven Priority Areas and 44 Programmes.

Strategic Pillar 1. Steering the Higher Education System consists of 4 Priority Areas.

Together they concern putting into place the necessary structures, policies and processes to strengthen governance and accountability of the higher education system in Lebanon, whilst also recognising the importance of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Four strategic objectives have been identified as critical components.

- **Priority Area 1** specifically focuses on governance and accountability of the whole Lebanese higher education system – including both the public Lebanese University and the private universities. Without a more effective governance system, independent of political influence and with the authority and responsibility to implement and monitor reforms, it will not be possible to implement the other elements of the *5-year Higher Education Plan*.
- **Priority Area 2** is focused on improving the overall quality of the learning experience for students and of the outcomes from higher education (including relevance to the labour market). Quality impacts directly on the contribution that higher education makes to peoples' lives and to the social and economic progress of the country. The absence of a national quality assurance system in Lebanon is a serious weakness which threatens the status and reputation of the country.
- **Priority Area 3** seeks to address immediate funding issues and to put in place a more comprehensive and sustainable funding model for Lebanese higher education into the future. The higher education system and its institutions require the appropriate level of resources to function at the level required to meet institutional and national objectives. This requires addressing the core funding needs of the Lebanese University as well as developing a performance-based funding model to ensure accountability. In addition, a strategic funding instrument, accessible to all

universities, would offer the potential to harness the capacity of the entire higher education system to meet the social and economic goals of Lebanon.

- **Priority Area 4** seeks to put in place a comprehensive higher education management information system (HEMIS) phased over a period of some years. This work is a vital underpinning of both the governance, regulatory and quality assurance systems discussed above, as well as the proposals for funding for the system. Therefore, it is one of the highest priorities. Institutional capacity building should go hand in hand with the development of HEMIS and the sooner work begins the better.

These results will be achieved only:

- **If** a system of HE governance and regulation is introduced which does not have direct involvement and influence from the political system;
- **If** a quality assurance system, which meets international best practice, is introduced and fully implemented across the entire higher education system, inclusive of both public and private universities and HEIs;
- **If** a funding system for Lebanese higher education, with appropriate performance and accountability elements, is introduced to enable the system to function at the level required to meet institutional and national objectives;
- **If** a comprehensive data and information management system is established in order to collect, monitor and regulate higher education quality, performance and productivity, as well as achievement of the goals set in the 5-year plan.

Strategic Pillar 2. Improving Relevance and Quality Outcomes consists of 4 Priority Areas. Together they focus on strengthening and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and especially improving the relevance of educational programmes and pedagogies for the labour market, with an emphasis on entrepreneurial education and training, student engagement, and the use of technology. Similarly, the research system, including doctoral training, needs considerable strengthening and support if it is going to play the role required by Lebanese society.

- **Priority Area 5** focuses on ensuring that the education system – through the range and type of educational programmes offered and the student learning experience – is sufficiently aligned with the needs of Lebanese society, and the regional and international labour market. Enhancing the employability attributes of university graduates includes broadening their educational choices and opportunities, introducing entrepreneurship education and focusing on their “soft skills”. All of this is vital if Lebanon is to overcome the problems of graduate unemployment.
- **Priority Area 6** emphasises the importance of, and the need to, strengthen University-based Research, Development and innovation (RDI). RDI supports innovation and economic development and makes a significant contribution to the quality of undergraduate education and outcomes. Without the development of a National Research Policy and Strategic Framework the research system will fail to develop to the level required for Lebanon to play a role in global science or at the national level. National research priority areas that have an impact on Lebanon' socio-economic

development should be defined and funded. There is an urgent necessity to capitalise on current university strengths and on key opportunities for Lebanon as it recovers.

- **Priority Area 7** concerns doctoral education. The quality of doctoral education is an important indicator of the quality of the higher education system and of the innovation capability of the country. The absence of a pipeline of doctoral talent and post-doctoral opportunities will seriously hinder a country's ambition to create a knowledge-research-innovation ecosystem and to stimulate higher levels of industrial R&D.
- **Priority Area 8** concerns putting in place the structures and processes for continual improvement of teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment, and ensuring that they are fit-for-purpose in the 21st century. This is especially important to ensure that educational opportunities and learning outcomes are more strongly aligned with the needs of Lebanese society now and into the future. Digitalisation of learning in response to the Covid pandemic is transformational and the lessons of the past few years need to be embedded across the whole system.

These results will only be achieved:

- **If** the higher education system collectively and individually provides the range of education programmes and opportunities which enables students to achieve personal growth, to gain decent employment, and to contribute to improvements in society;
- **If** the research system collectively can contribute to global knowledge as well as contributing to the social and economic development and competitiveness of Lebanon;
- **If** the quality of doctoral training is enhanced by the formation of collaborative approaches which builds on existing expertise while expanding opportunities;
- **If** teaching and learning encompasses new pedagogical approaches and innovative and digital formats, and reflects the needs of more diverse students and societal and labour market opportunities.

Strategic Pillar 3. Strengthening Social Responsibility and Competitiveness consists of three strategic objectives. Together they focus on strengthening the role and social responsibilities of Lebanon's higher education institutions, improving their international competitiveness and social cohesion.

- **Priority Area 9** concerns the role universities and other institutions of higher education play within Lebanese society and their responsibilities with regard to strengthening social and economic sustainability, public discourse and democratic values. In a knowledge-based society, universities play a significant role in knowledge production, catalysing creativity, triggering invention and accelerating innovation. A key aspect is the way universities work collaboratively and with industry/business and cultural sectors to form an innovation eco-system.
- **Priority Area 10** emphasises the importance of maintaining and developing Lebanon's higher education international engagement – in terms of student and academic mobility and participation in global science. The shift to on-line learning expands the opportunities for international partnerships in teaching and research, enabling

participation by students who may otherwise have been restricted by personal, family or financial circumstances. A key focus is on the importance of forming strategic partnerships with international peer institutions for collaborative projects as well as peer-learning and benchmarking.

- **Priority Area 11** focuses on improving social cohesion by widening participation and improving equality, diversity and inclusion. Universities wherever they are located across Lebanon must value, encourage and support tolerance and openness, promote inclusive education systems by removing barriers that limit participation and achievement of all learners, and respect diverse needs, abilities and characteristics in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.²²

These results will only be achieved:

- **If** each university, led by its senior leadership, develops a comprehensive and well-coordinated set of policies and actions for civic engagement;
- **If** Lebanon, and its universities, develop a strategy for internationalisation based on strategic partnerships to build capacity as well as enriching cultural exchange;
- **If** the universities demonstrably encourage, support and practice tolerance and openness and integrity, and promote policies of equality, diversity and inclusion.

²² Sustainable Development Goal 4: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4>; Education 2030 Framework for Action, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656>; UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Strategic Pillar 1:
Steering the Higher Education System

Chapter 4.

Priority Area 1: Strengthen Governance and Accountability

Establish an effective governance and accountability system for Lebanese Higher Education at national and institutional levels.

4.1 Why governance matters

Governance and regulation arrangements are central to the aim of governments to steer higher education systems and institutions so that they better contribute to the public interest as stated in national objectives. The focus of governments around the world on effective governance and regulation has increased in recent years. The forces for this increase in focus include the fact that higher education is seen increasingly as central to economic growth, and to social and personal development. This has led to a fast pace of growth in the sector and demands for access by a growing proportion of populations. There are high expectations of higher education institutions. They are required to create knowledge through research and to train the skilled workers the economy needs through their educational mission. They are expected to respond to student and societal needs, including improving equity of access to, and participation in, its programmes. Other concerns of governments include the protection of students as consumers and the impact of international ranking systems. In the case of publicly funded universities, governments under financial pressure on multiple fronts are also increasingly focussed on ensuring efficiency and on universities delivering outcomes that address labour market needs as well as wider economic and social needs.

In this environment, governance and regulation of higher education institutions and systems are a major preoccupation of policy makers who seek to retain the dynamism of the sector, based on a high level of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, while ensuring that the institutions contribute effectively to national objectives. Governance has become a major leverage tool for improving quality, including relevance, in all aspects of higher education.

According to the OECD, governance constitutes the following:

Governance encompasses the structures, relationships and processes through which, at both, national and institutional levels, policies for tertiary education are developed, implemented and reviewed. Governance comprises a complex web including the legislative framework, the characteristics of the institutions and how they relate to the whole system, how money is allocated to institutions and how they are accountable for the way it is spent, as well as less formal structures and relationships which steer and influence behaviour.²³

²³ OECD. (2003). *Changing Patterns of Governance in Higher Education*. In *Education Policy Analysis* (pp. 59–78). <https://doi.org/10.1787/epa-2003-en>

International practice

Internationally, there is no one dominant model of governance of higher education systems. There are however two distinct approaches, depending on the level of direct engagement the relevant government ministry has with the sector.

One approach is direct State regulation, usually by a Ministry of Education or Higher Education. There are also models where higher education is regulated under a ministry with responsibility for enterprise development. This approach gives governments a greater capacity to direct the higher education sector. However, unless used in a proportionate way, consistent with academic freedom and institutional autonomy, this closeness to government and to the political system carries risks for both sides. On the one hand heavy handed regulation can stymie innovation and the dynamism of institutions. On the other hand, governments may be held responsible for matters over which they have no control.

The other approach involves the government acting through an intermediary agency. A 2015 report of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *The Role of Intermediary Bodies in Enhancing Quality and Sustainability in Higher Education*,²⁴ describes the role and function of such bodies well, drawing on wide international practice. It states that the experience of several jurisdictions suggests lessons on how intermediary bodies can be helpful to governments.

An intermediary body is not a substitute for a government ministry. In all of the jurisdictions studied, the intermediary body complements specialised staff, either in a self-standing ministry or within a department of education, who support the government in developing policies for steering the direction of the higher education system. An intermediary body can be useful in helping a government achieve its objectives for quality and sustainability in higher education. The intermediary body may assist in shaping objectives, building long-term political support for them and carrying them out, especially when the decisions required could be politically sensitive.

Depending on the jurisdiction, some of the relative strengths of intermediary bodies relative to government departments may be:

- Greater availability of executive time to deal with multiple stakeholders;
- Specialised staff with advanced training in higher education policy;
- A longer time perspective, both past and future, and a capacity to pursue a policy direction continuously over time;
- A capacity to make judgments based on qualitative and non-standardised information that cannot be reduced to formulae – for example, judgments about academic quality, resource allocation and institutional mission;
- Arm's-length distance from government administrative and decision-making processes that tend to reduce time on task;
- Insulation from the pressures of constituency-based politics;
- A capacity to insulate government from controversial decisions.

²⁴ D. Trick (2015) *The Role of Intermediary Bodies in Enhancing Quality and Sustainability in Higher Education*, Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.
http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Trick_Intermediaries_ENG.pdf

Such bodies, the Report notes, occupy “a zone of relative independence between the government and the higher education institutions”. Such independence is an effective way to avoid the hazards of excessive and inappropriate influence on higher education institutions from the political system.

Underpinning principles

Having regard to international experience and trends, the following principles inform the proposals for an effective governance and accountability framework for Lebanese higher education institutions. The framework should:

- Cover all key actors across the Lebanese HE system, including the public Lebanese University and the private universities, but with some differentiation of approach to reflect the diversity of ownership and traditions of the institutions;
- Provide for a clear separation of roles and responsibilities between the various actors in the higher education system;
- Set out clearly the lines of accountability between the various governmental bodies;
- Provide a level of regulation that is proportionate to the public interest and recognises the autonomy of universities to manage their internal affairs;
- Not encroach upon the academic freedom of staff or students;
- Have clear separation from the political system, but with clear lines of accountability to Parliament and other control and monitoring bodies;
- Provide mechanisms through which the Ministry, acting in the public interest, can develop a more coherent, differentiated and integrated system of higher education institutions which, combined, can best serve the social and economic interests of Lebanon;
- Set out the responsibilities of the universities in respect of internal governance as well as the mechanisms in place to ensure good governance practice;
- At the level of the individual university ensure that there is clear separation between corporate governance and academic governance.

4.2 Current Governance and Regulatory Structure in Lebanon

The governing structure of Lebanese higher education is as represented in Figure 3 below. It involves a number of inter-connected bodies. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is the primary body with the Directorate General of Higher Education. This position is vacant at present, and the functions are exercised by the Director of Education.

The draft law on the Structure of the Directorate General of Higher Education states in its opening paragraph:

The Directorate General of Higher Education is concerned with monitoring the implementation of the strategy of higher education and with the affairs of higher education, both private and public in Lebanon, considering the autonomy of the Lebanese University and the principle of freedom of private education in accordance with the laws in force.

As a general statement of the role of the DGHE this is reasonable. However, the Draft Law goes on to specify a very wide range of functions relating to strategic, operational and quality matters and including functions in respect of the Council for Higher Education. For a single body to exercise such a wide range of functions presents significant practical difficulties. This includes a loss of focus on what should be priorities of the Ministry and the DGHE and creates some conflicts of interest – especially relating to quality assurance issues.

According to Law 285/2014 the other governance bodies are:

- *Council for Higher Education (CHE)*. The Council is the highest authority in the sector. It is presided over by the Minister of Education and Higher Education and is formed by: i/ the Director General of Higher Education, ii/ a judge, iii/ the president of the Lebanese University, iv/ three representatives of private HEIs, v/ two experts, and vi/ one or more chairpersons of the professional orders whenever the issue involves the corresponding profession.
- *Academic Technical Committee*. This Committee is responsible for reporting technically and academically on i/ licensing, ii/ start of activities in an institution, unit or programme, and iii/ regular monitoring and evaluation. This is done according to criteria set by the Committee itself. This Committee is presided over by the Director General of Higher Education and is formed by: i/ a judge, ii/ four experts from the private HEIs, iii/ three experts from the Lebanese University, and iv/ two independent experts.
- *Specialised Committees*. These committees provide specialised academic opinion regarding the licensing and start of activities of a new programme and perform regular academic and technical evaluation of the existing programmes.
- *Recognition and Equivalence Committee* oversees recognition and equivalence of degrees and diplomas. It is presided over by the Director General of Higher Education and includes: i/ a judge, ii/ two experts from the Lebanese University, and iii/ four experts from the private HEIs.

In addition, there are some specialised committees, such as the *Colloquium Committee* and the *Engineering Committee*.

Since 2008, the Erasmus+ Programme has developed a team of Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs). Their main role is to support the Ministry in all reforms and activities related to higher education. The HEREs have been working closely with DGHE during the past years. They have participated in many committees and have conducted two national consultations aimed at identifying the priorities in higher education the results of which are public.

Law 285/2014 is ambiguous regarding quality assurance (QA). A few articles refer to a potential a Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency while other articles refer to evaluations conducted by the *Academic Technical Committee* and the *Specialised Committees* and even to accreditation by external agencies. The issue of quality assurance is addressed in detail under Strategic Objective 2.

The legislative framework in Lebanon is divided into two domains: the public and the private higher education. Private higher education is regulated by law 285/2014 that sets its

objectives, its governing bodies, the criteria and procedures for licensing and monitoring, and the principles of management in private higher education institutions. The regulation of private higher education also depends on two other decrees. Decree 10068/2013 regulates PhD programmes and decree 2176/2018 defines the rules and procedures for licensing, starting-up and recognition of programmes.

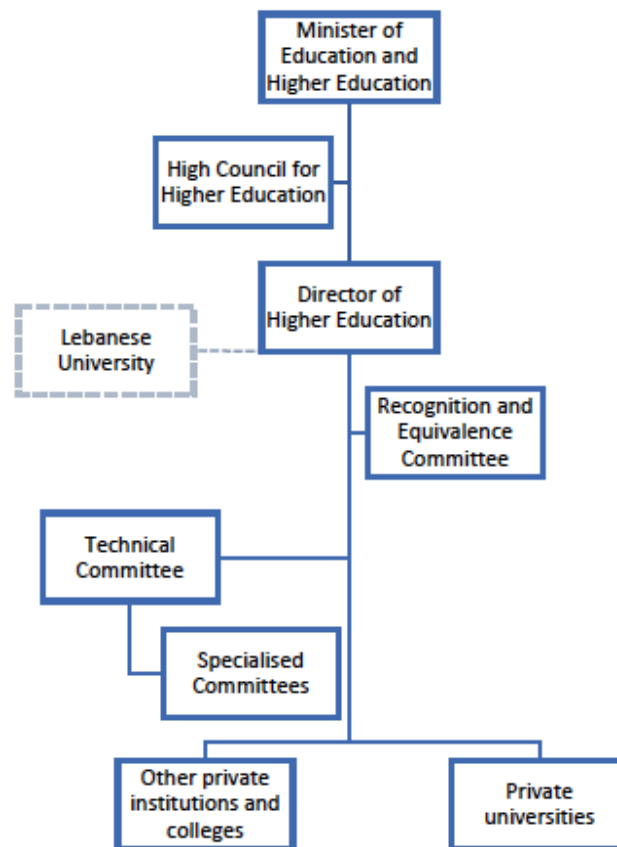
The Lebanese University is fully autonomous academically, administratively, and financially. It is organised according to law 75/1967. Law 6/1970 regulates the work of its teaching staff. Its financial system was established in 1970 with the decree 14246. Given the centrality of the Lebanese University to the higher education system it is not appropriate that it should stand apart from the general governance and regulation of the system. While some accommodations should be made for the differing contexts of public and private universities, they should all form a coherent system operating to certain common rules and processes. Central among these are the quality assurance processes.

Law 285/2014 does not regulate the research structure and activities. Nevertheless, scientific research is mentioned as an important activity in higher education especially for the post-graduate programmes (PhD programmes). It is also mentioned in Article 5 that a university needs to allocate at least 5% of its budget to support its research activities. At present a major split exists between higher education and research. Research is nationally regulated by the National Council for Scientific Research (NCSR) that reports to the prime minister. The NCSR was established by the law 5/1962. Two main decrees support its regulation 12765/1963 and 3219/1965. Divisions between higher education and research prevents the dynamic and mutually supporting relationship that should exist between them. Research should inform teaching and bring to the lecture room the latest in knowledge in any discipline. At the same time exposure of students to research outcomes and methods provides the basis for future masters and doctoral students.

While Law 285/2014 addresses a range of issues, including those referred to above, it is worth noting that few decrees have been issued to support the application of the law. The main two decrees issued relate to the *Recognition and Equivalence Committee* (Decree 2176/2018) and the *Doctoral Studies* (Decree 10068/2013).

In addition to Law 285/2014, two draft laws have been in the Parliament since 2011: the establishment of a Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency, and the structuring of the directorate general of higher education. The first calls for an independent agency conducting external transparent evaluations on institutions and programmes. The second draft law would establish an administrative structure for the DGHE which currently does not have such a structured administrative body. It is worth noting that two European projects (Tempus/TLQAA and Erasmus+/TLQAA+) have been conducted and proved the feasibility of establishing a QA agency and conducting external evaluation of institutions and programmes.

Figure 3. Governance of the Lebanese Higher Education as per Law 285/2014.



4.3 An Integrated and Differentiated Post-Secondary Education System

As noted in Chapter 1, the Lebanese post-secondary education system is characterised by an over-emphasis by Lebanese society on higher education as the passport to personal success. This is in spite of the fact that the economy has not, up to now, been capable of absorbing many of those who graduate. At the same time there is evidence of shortages of technicians and technical skills. Addressing this situation requires an integrated policy approach across the post-secondary system with clear and easily accessible pathways from vocational and higher education and the reverse.

Related to this, at the level of higher education, measures need to be taken to develop a system of more diversified institutions offering different levels of qualifications in a range of disciplines. The objective should be to support a diversification of the learning offer while assuring comparable social and economic value. The post-secondary education landscape would then be shaped by a network of higher education institutions, where differentiated institutions with complementary roles join forces to build a solid network offering a broad range of outcomes from teaching and research. The concept of networked higher education may also offer higher resilience in the context of crises like the present. The distinction provided for in Law 285/2014 (Articles 6 and 7) is not sufficient for this purpose.

Meeting the needs of Lebanon into the future requires developing a robust, future-focused policy for life-long learning which embraces new forms of credentials and innovative learning. It also requires developing innovative learning pathways for students entering post-secondary education, and for mature learners seeking opportunity to reskill and upskill.

4.4 Institutional Governance

The fact that a corporate body/legal entity is a higher education institution has particular implications for governance over and above the normal requirements of a corporate body. The key governance entities in a higher education institution are the governing body (board of trustees), the academic council and the chief executive/president/rector.

The governing body is the supreme authority in the institution, setting policy and overseeing its implementation, ensuring the financial stability of the institution and in general having oversight of all activities of the institution. Given its power and influence, the composition of this body is of particular importance. Law 285/2014 refers to the governing body as the “high authority” but it does not provide for its composition. While acknowledging the property rights of the owner(s) of a university, the composition of the governing body should reflect a diversity of expertise and experience. This will promote diversity of views and avoid the hazards of “group think”. In addition, good practice internationally requires that a governing body should have a significant proportion of its members who are independent of the owner(s) and the inclusion of staff and students of the institution is also good practice. These are also requirements that are likely to arise in the context of quality assurance reviews of an institution.

A second issue of special significance in the governance of a university is the relationship between corporate and academic governance. A key objective should be to ensure that the Academic Board/Council, and the decisions they make, have sufficient and appropriate independence from the Governing Body. This will avoid any actual or perceived interference by the latter in academic matters or in matters impinging on quality assurance processes, including curriculum, teaching and assessment. It is also an important protection for academic freedom.

The Academic Board has responsibility for overseeing the academic affairs of a university. It is the highest authority of the university in academic matters and is the protector of academic values, integrity and quality. It has a special responsibility to ensure that all elements and requirements of quality assurance processes, both internal and mandated externally from such as a QA agency, are fully complied with. The autonomy of the Academic Board can be enhanced by the appointment as chair of a person who is independent of the institution.

The third pillar of governance in the university is its chief officer/president, who should be appointed by the governing body. As reflected in Article 59 Law 285, he/she is responsible for operational matters in the university, and that the university implements relevant laws and regulations. He/she is accountable to the governing body.

4.5 Programme Actions

Table 4. Overview of Priority Area 1 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: STEERING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM
PRIORITY AREA 1: Strengthen Governance and Accountability
Establish an effective governance and accountability system for Lebanese Higher Education at national and institutional levels, setting out the legal norms and organisational arrangements for all key actors across the Lebanese HE system
Programme 1.1 Implement a new Governance Framework for Lebanon Higher Education System.
Programme 1.2 Strengthen the role of the DGHE towards Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at the level of framing and organisation of Higher Education and at the level of controlling, following-up and monitoring.
Programme 1.3 Strengthen the role of the DGHE with respect to university-based research, and Establishing cooperation and partnership between DGHE and LNCSR.
Programme 1.4 Review the constitution of the Council for Higher Education as an intermediary body and its function and autonomy.
Programme 1.5 Establish Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA) (same as Programme 2.1).
Programme 1.6. Review Law 285/2014 in order to develop and modernise the Lebanese Higher Education sector.
Programme 1.7 Develop an integrated and diversified post-secondary education system.
Programme 1.8 Review and modernise governance in HEIs in order to instore new governance arrangements in line with those implemented internationally.

The following programme actions will provide a more coherent and effective system of governance and accountability than currently exists, disaggregating a range of functions that are currently performed by the Ministry, the Council for Higher Education and various committees. An effective governance system, and its related processes, are essential to delivering on the other objectives of this policy, and in particular in delivering quality outcomes for students, Lebanese society and its economy. The intention is to establish a cascade of accountability across four levels (See Figure 4):

- Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) acting through the Director General of Higher Education (DGHE)
- Council for Higher Education (CHE)
- Lebanon Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (LQAA)
- Institutional governance arrangements

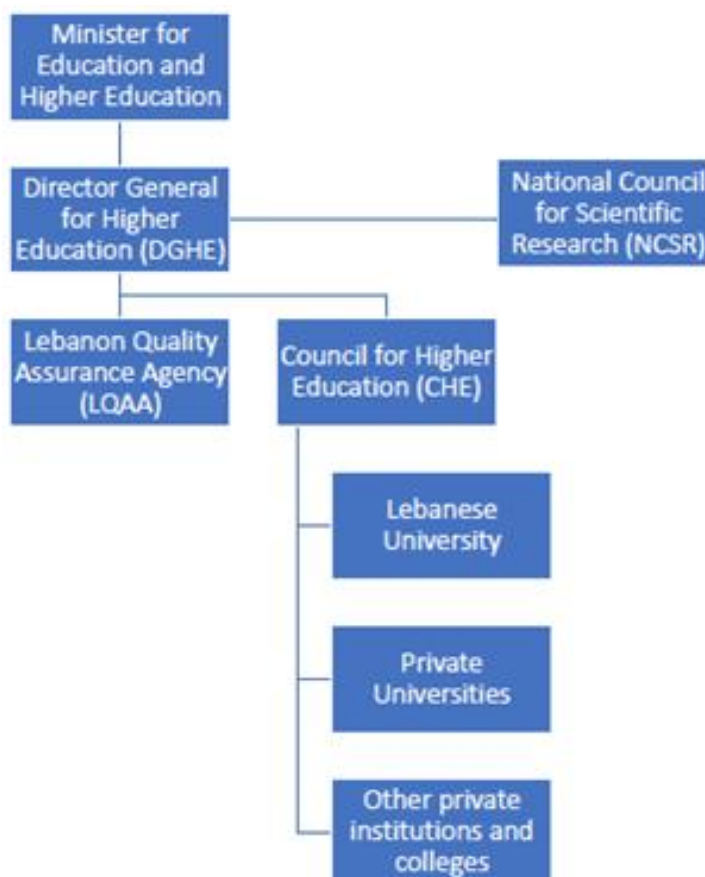
This will strengthen and improve effectiveness of governance and accountability as well as recognise institutional autonomy.

There are 8 programme actions.

Programme 1.1. Implement a new Governance Framework for Lebanon Higher Education System.

The Minister and the Ministry occupy the topmost position in the accountability cascade and all other elements of the higher education system are accountable, directly or indirectly, to the Minister. In turn the Minister is accountable to Parliament as part of the political system.

Figure 4. New Governance and Regulatory Structure for Lebanon.



The role of the Ministry should be focused primarily on policy and strategy as well as the overall direction of the higher education system and its responsibilities vis a vis the public interest. To that end the following functions are proposed:

- *Policy and strategic planning:* The development of policy for higher education and research and strategic planning for the sector. These are core functions of the Ministry and provide democratic accountability for the performance of the higher education system and its contribution to the social and economic development of Lebanon. These functions should be carried out in consultation with the Council for Higher Education, the National Council for Scientific Research and with the higher education institutions;
- *Funding:* The Ministry has responsibility to negotiate primarily with the Finance Ministry the annual financial allocation to be made to higher education, having regard to the needs of the sector and the overall total public funding available to support Government priorities;

- *Oversight of the Council for Higher Education (CHE):* While it is proposed (see next section) that the CHE would have substantial autonomy in carrying out its functions, it will report to the DGHE in respect of all its activities, with ultimate accountability to the Minister;
- *Legislation:* The preparation of proposals for legislation to give effect to policy and the enactment process in Parliament;
- *Liaison across government:* As a Ministry within the Government, MEHE will liaise with other Ministries on matters relating to higher education and research with the aim of ensuring co-ordination and coherence of policies and interaction with HEIs;
- *International relationships:* The Ministry will take a lead role in developing relationships with other countries in the region, sharing best practices and providing where practicable mutual support. It will also play a lead role in developing and maintaining wider international relationships, including membership of international bodies or entering into international agreements or treaties relating to higher education and research.

Programme 1.2. Strengthen the role of the DGHE towards Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at the level of framing and organisation of Higher Education and at the level of controlling, following-up and monitoring.

The Directorate under the direction of the DGHE will provide the administrative support to the Minister in carrying out his functions. It is a key position in the Ministry and in the higher education system. The Directorate will be provided with the financial and staff resources necessary to carry out its functions. Among the staff resources needed are staff with the following competences:

- Reform and Policy analysis
- Data collection, analysis and planning
- Management and legislation
- Financial and accountancy
- Corporate governance in a higher education context.

Programme 1.3. Strengthen the role of the DGHE with respect to university-based research, and establishing cooperation and partnership between DGHE and LNCSR.

The objective is to remove the current split between teaching and university-based research so as to create the dynamic and mutually supportive relationship that should exist between these two key functions of a university. University research must be as closely aligned as possible with the national research priorities defined by the LNCSR, and close collaboration is essential in this regard.

Programme 1.4. Review the constitution of the Council for Higher Education as an intermediary body and its function and autonomy.

The objective is to reconstitute the Council for Higher Education as an intermediary body - intermediary between the government and the higher education sector. As such it will

operate independently from the political system and with a high level of autonomy from the Ministry. It will however be fully accountable to the Ministry for all its activities.

Composition of the CHE

The composition of the CHE will be competency-based with members having the experience and expertise relevant to the functions of the Council as well as organisational governance and management. Some members will be appointed from outside Lebanon who have expertise in higher education and research. The members will be appointed by the Minister in accordance with regulations set down in legislation. The Council will appoint its chief executive and staff and may operate through committees. It may as required see additional advice by way of experts to conduct studies and analyses. The following proposal provides a suitable model for the constitution of the CHE:

- The Board should be composed of nine members of which at least one-third of members should be international non-Lebanese experts. People with senior international experience, preferably at the system or institutional level, should be chosen to participate on the CHE;
- Every effort will be made to recruit international members from a variety of different countries;
- Council members should be selected by the Minister on the basis of competences and ethics and normally expected to have worked in national and international contexts;
- Overall Council membership will be composed with a view to balance of gender, broad discipline areas and types of university;
- Membership of the Council should be time-limited, with each member appointed for a period of 5 years. Only one period of renewal is possible;
- The chairperson of the Council will be appointed by members of the Council;
- Council should include a student representative and a representative from business/civil society.

Functions of the Council

The CHE will carry out the following high-level functions:

- Implement policy as determined by the Minister and Government and be accountable to the Ministry for all its activities;
- Support the development of higher education and research;
- Promote an appreciation of the value of higher education and research;
- Promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education;
- Design funding mechanisms for use in determining the amount of funding payable to a higher education institution and oversee the implementation of such mechanisms, including the provision of grants and scholarships to students;
- Monitor the performance of institutions, and the higher education system;
- Publish guidelines to institutions on what constitutes good governance practice and good financial management;
- Conduct audits of the financial affairs of any HEI that receives public funding;
- Conduct research into higher education, nationally and internationally, publish reports arising from such research;

- Collect and analyse data and statistics relating to the higher education system such as data relating to students and staff, publish reports and studies based on such data;
- Provide advice to the Minister on any matter relating to the development or operation of the higher education system or individual institutions.

Programme 1.5. Establish the Lebanon Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA) (same as Programme 2.1).

An effective quality assurance system is a key part of an effective governance and accountability system for higher education. There should be a close working relationship between the CHE and the LQAA. The importance of a quality assurance system and proposals for how it should be introduced discussed in Priority Area 2; see specifically Programme 2.1.

Programme 1.6. Review Law 285/2014 in order to develop and modernise the Lebanese Higher Education sector.

Law 285/2014 should be reviewed, and revised if necessary, to ensure that it is line with the objectives and ambitions of the *Lebanon Five-year Higher Education Plan*, and with international best practice with respect to higher education and research.

Other relevant legislation and/or regulations and decrees should also be reviewed to ensure alignment with international best practice.

There should be good alignment between the law on higher education and other legislation, such as for the LQAA, and with the new structure for the DGHE.

Programme 1.7. Develop an integrated and diversified post-secondary education system.

The CHE will develop a more integrated and diversified post-secondary education system. It will develop an integrated policy approach across the post-secondary system with clear and easily accessible learning pathways from vocational and higher education and the reverse. In doing so, the CHE will utilise funding and other policy instruments and work with the QA Agency and the VET authorities.

Programme 1.8. Review and modernise governance in HEIs in order to instore new governance arrangements in line with those implemented internationally.

To ensure good governance across all Lebanese universities, all universities will be required to have the following governance arrangements.²⁵ HEIs may establish additional structures as appropriate and necessary to ensure good effective and efficient governance.

The good practice model presented below should be advocated and implemented as far as practicable across the system, and by individual institutions:

- Establish a Governing Authority which is collectively responsible for the long-term sustainability of the University:
 - Its members will ensure independent oversight on key issues such as strategy, performance, resources, key appointments, and standards of conduct;

²⁵ Shattock, M. (2006). *Good Governance in Higher Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

- It takes the final decision on matters which have a significant impact on the University;
- The Governing Authority appoints the Vice-Chancellor/President.
- Members of the Governing Authority are:
 - Independent of the owners of the university;
 - Include students and staff members;
 - Membership should be time-limited, with each member appointed for (an indicative) period of 5 years. Only one period of renewal is possible;
 - Overall Board membership will be composed with a view to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Ensure there is an appropriate separation between corporate and academic governance.
- Appoint a chairperson of the Academic Council who is independent of the university as far as practicable.
- Ensure that each university has a Quality Assurance Office which has the expertise and resources to develop and implement an internal quality assurance system in alignment with the policies and procedures set out by the LQAA.

Chapter 5.

Priority Area 2: Enhance Quality and Quality Assurance

Develop an internationally recognised accreditation and quality assurance system to assure the quality of the student experience and the outcomes from individual HEIs and collectively across the higher education system.

5.1 Why Quality Assurance Matters for Lebanon

Quality in education and training programmes and institutions should be a concern to everyone in Lebanon. A quality assurance (QA) system establishes a sense of accountability and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of providers of higher education. It provides assurance to government, students and graduates, future employers and society overall that the institutions and programmes of study, and their related support infrastructure, are of the highest standards. Quality attests to the skills and capabilities of graduates and the mutual recognition of the qualifications.

In addition, the quality of educational provision and qualifications are fundamental to a country's social and economic prosperity, sustainability and competitiveness. For an open trading economy like Lebanon, quality carries economic consequences. It is vital for its international reputation, status and pride as a nation. Furthermore, high quality qualifications bring added importance for Lebanese emigrants helping them be competitive in the global labour market, especially given the high share of GDP offered by the incoming remittances. This places quality assurance at the centre of Lebanese government policy. A quality assurance system encompasses two aspects: external and internal quality assurance.

- **External quality assurance** or accreditation provides official recognition that an institution or programme meets standards of quality and is legally permitted to issue qualifications. A thorough review is undertaken by an independent process involving an external panel. It provides the basis for mutual recognition of Lebanese institutions and qualifications by other countries in the region and beyond and vice versa recognition of foreign qualifications.

In addition, a country's QA agency, and its accreditation policies and procedures must themselves meet international standards as determined by an independent external review process.

- **Internal quality assurance** demonstrates an HEI's commitment to meeting high standards of quality. Each HEI develops policies and procedures to continuously and rigorously review and enhance the quality of all their education and training programmes, including the design, delivery and assessment of all enrolled learners on those programmes. Internal QA should meet national and international standards as determined by an independent external review process.

An effective quality assurance (QA) system is essential to ensure that the Lebanese system of higher education meets international standards of excellence and is relevant and responsive

to the needs of all learners, the Lebanese economy, and its society. Quality assurance goes beyond looking at inputs to the education process; it focuses attention on the educational outcomes and outputs of the institutions, for students and for society. For a country with a history of immigration and emigration, a quality assurance system should ensure that its qualifications are internationally comparable and accepted by other countries in the region and around world, as well as provide a framework to recognise qualifications for other countries. Thus, the aim is to provide the basis for mutual recognition of qualifications.

The key objectives and principles of a quality assurance system are as follows:

1. Provides public and legal notification that an institution and its programmes meet standards of quality set forth by the Government and/or its accreditation agency.
2. Operates fully independently of the Ministry and Government and external influences, and is seen to be independent in all its functions and decision-making.
3. Combines the principles of public accountability and on-going self-assessment and continuous improvement.
4. Helps advance standards and promote excellence.
5. Helps students determine acceptable institutions to pursue their education.
6. Helps employers determine the validity of programmes of study and whether a graduate is qualified.
7. Provides the basis for mutual recognition of institutions, programmes and qualifications, and assists in determining acceptability of foreign qualifications and transfer credits.
8. Provides significant economic and reputational benefit for the country and its citizens.

In conclusion, a quality assurance system provides assurance to the Government, learners and graduates, current and future employers, and society overall that the higher education institutions, programmes of study, the qualifications provided, and their related support infrastructure, are of the highest international standards.

The absence of an independent quality assurance system means HEIs are operating without any uniform set of guidelines. This creates a situation in which standards and quality are potentially vulnerable to external, partial and non-educational pressures and demands. This is wholly unsafe for the country and for learners.

5.2 Overview of Quality and Quality Assurance Practice in Lebanon

There is no national integrated quality assurance system in Lebanon. The Lebanese higher education system expanded considerably over recent decades in response to growing demand. Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of new institutions established and licenses issued without sufficient consideration given to quality or to the needs of Lebanese society and the economy. Licenses are not subject to review after a fixed period of time.

In the absence of a national legal framework, institutions rely on their own networks to obtain institutional or programmatic accreditation. As a result, there is an uneven approach to quality assurance leading to concerns about a drop-in quality in an environment of uncontrolled expansion. This is creating serious and profound problems related to the

reputation of the system as a whole, for individual institutions and for individuals – difficulties which are exacerbated due to current financial and economic difficulties.²⁶

Article 36 in the Law 285/2014 refers to quality assurance and to the responsibility of each private Higher Education institution...[to] impose upon itself and upon its programs, and at its own expenses, external and self-assessment in view of obtaining institutional and programmatic accreditation in accordance with requirements fixed by a decree issued by the Cabinet upon proposal from the Minister assigned to rules in this regard set by the National Quality Assurance Agency.

Article 37 refers to a Quality Assurance Agency to be established through a special act but does not provide any details regarding the institutions accredited by international agencies.

A national agency for quality assurance shall be established by virtue of a special law dedicated for this purpose. This agency shall set the national standards that must be met to ensure quality in higher education.

Private institutions accredited by international agencies shall be subject to accreditation according to mechanisms defined in a decree by the Cabinet based on a proposal from the Minister, based on the opinion of the National Quality Assurance Agency.

In addition to its role in assuring the quality of what is provided at the initiation of an institution, a faculty, or a campus, Articles 20-21 and 55 assign to the Academic Technical Committee the roles of verification of an institution and its programmes and periodic evaluation for quality control. Similarly, Article 24 assigns to the Specialised Committees the role of periodic evaluation of academic programmes.

Since passage of the Law, two decrees have been issued with regard to the *Recognition and Equivalence Committee* (Decree 2176/2018) and *Doctoral Studies* (Decree 10068/2013).

A draft law to establish a Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (LQAA) has been under discussion since 2011. It provides for the setting out of “policies, procedures and actions that aim at improving, fostering and enhancing the quality” leading to a process of external institutional and programme accreditation and internal quality assurance through self-evaluation by the institution itself, as well as external quality assurance of the LQAA.

The Council of Higher Education, established in 1961, has responsibility for licensing new higher education institutions, with the exception of the Lebanese University which is governed by its own law and has its own autonomous structures. MEHE has introduced some quality control procedures with regard to licensing mechanisms. Accordingly, the Academic Technical Committee has responsibility for licensing, starting up programmes and auditing HEIs, and the Equivalence Committee has authority for recognising degrees. The Engineering Committee recognises engineering qualifications while examinations are required for all specialties in Health Sciences (e.g., Physician, Dentistry, Physiotherapy, Nursing, etc.) prior to practicing.

²⁶ UNESCO. (2009). *A decade of higher education in the Arab States: Achievements and challenges*. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Beirut/pdf/Regional_Report_on_Higher_Education_in_the_Arab_States.pdf

The licensing process works as follows: an evaluation file is prepared by the MEHE/DGHE and discussed by the Council of Higher Education and associated academic technical committees, which may conduct some follow-up reviews. The Council formulates a recommendation based on a report of the Academic Technical Committee for licensing. The final decision on licensing a HEI is made by the Council of the Ministers. The “start-up” process is followed by an audit visit or an on-site visit to verify the institution’s compliance with the licensing criteria. Assessment of academic programmes is conducted by specialised committees whose reports are submitted to the Academic Technical Committee.

The MEHE permits HEIs to seek accreditation from international quality assurance and accreditation agencies of their choice, either at the institutional, programme or professional level. Only 14 of the 51, or 27%, of the HEIs operating in Lebanon have indicated they have been either institutionally accredited or have had programmes reviewed by an international agency, such as HCERES, MSCHE, ACQUIN, NECHE, FIBAA, IEP, EVALAG and AAQ²⁷. In addition, several academic programmes have been accredited by professional accreditation processes. In summary, Lebanon has identified many of the components required for a quality assurance system, but they are not integrated, and the key legislation has never been implemented. As currently operating, the licensing process and procedures relative to licensing, “start-up”, and evaluation should be considered as quality control. Quality control is similar to an inspection of operational matters. This differs significantly from a quality assurance system which focuses on educational quality or student learning outcomes and typically covers all aspects of the quality system to ensure good outcomes for learners and society. This work is undertaken by the Academic Technical Committee and various specialist committees which are not sufficiently resourced. As such, the review process does not meet accepted international standards.

Seeking external evaluation at both institutional and programmatic levels is common within the Higher Education sector in Lebanon. Awareness about internal and external quality assurance mechanisms has been raised through different national activities and international projects. In several Erasmus+ projects²⁸ significant sets of tools have been established and experimented in pilot evaluation of institutions and programmes. Several Lebanese experts participate as international experts in evaluations conducted abroad.

However, thirty-seven Lebanese institutions and many more programmes are not accredited. While the current arrangement – whereby institutions may individually seek external review – may provide comfort to some universities, it creates an unsatisfactory quality and legal environment casting a negative impact on the overall quality of the Lebanese higher education system. It also facilitates a situation in which HEIs can effectively shop for accreditation potentially choosing poorly regulated “accreditors”, thus raising the possibility that accreditation is being sought for commercial rather than academic purposes.

²⁷ For example, Letters and Human Sciences by HCERES or IAA, Economics and Business by AASBI, ACPHA, EFMD, ACDSB, IACBE or AACSB, Design by NAAB or NASAD, Engineering and architecture by ABET, RIBA or EUR-ACE, Agriculture and Food Sciences by ACEND or LAAB, Medicine by TEPDAD, Health Sciences by CEPH, CASN, DAA, UKAF or CAPTE, Nursing by CCNE, Dentistry by ADEE or ADA, Pharmacy by AACP, CCAPP or ACPE

²⁸ <http://www.tlqaa.org> and <http://plus.tlqaa.org>

The recognition of degrees and diplomas is important for a country such as Lebanon with a long tradition of migration and a significant refugee population. To manage recognition and equivalence, Lebanon established the equivalence committee in 1955. The role was to give equivalence to the diplomas of private universities and institutions within Lebanon and to qualifications from abroad with reference to qualifications from Lebanese University. Reference to the Higher Education Recognition and Equivalency Committee is contained in Law 285, Articles 28-32. Based on the law the Recognition and Equivalency Committee may recognise the diplomas of private universities and institutions. It still gives equivalence to qualifications from abroad. In addition, there are profession-based committees.

Discussion regarding developing and implementing a Lebanese Qualifications Framework (LQF) began in 2013 but has not progressed. A LQF would provide a structured basis by which to ensure transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications between different countries and institutions.²⁹ Its establishment would replace a situation in which judgements about equivalences are potentially open to different interpretations and practices by different institutions in Lebanon. Moreover, a LNQF can form a structuring tool that nurtures a necessary dialogue to better align skills needs and the outcomes in terms of competences. This will serve in addressing the major challenge of skills and higher education alignment mentioned in the introductory section.

5.3 Programme Actions

Modernising the Lebanese Higher Education system and bringing it into alignment with international best practices constitutes a major and essential reform. A national quality assurance system – underpinned by the establishment of a Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA), key principles, policies and structures – should be implemented as a matter of urgency.

Implementation of the identified programme actions will benefit from the expertise learned from Lebanon’s involvement in different international and EU projects, in particular the Erasmus+ projects. Utilising this knowledge and experience will reduce the amount of additional and new resources and time required for implementing the actions as well as take advantage of expertise within Lebanon.

Priority Area 2 has a total of 13 programmes grouped under three sub-headings as illustrated in Table 5.

²⁹ See, for example, European Qualifications Framework, <https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

Table 5. Overview of Priority Area 2 Programmes.

Strategic Pillar 1. Steering the Higher Education System.
PRIORITY AREA 2: Enhance Quality and Quality Assurance.
Develop an internationally recognised quality assurance system to assure the quality of the student experience and the outcomes from individual HEIs and collectively across the higher education system.
Programme 2.1. Establish the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA).
Programme 2.2. Develop and implement Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and regulations.
Programme 2.3. Establish Quality Assurance operational process.
Programme 2.4. Establish Lebanese Register of Quality Assurance.
Programme 2.5. Produce sector report on the Quality of Lebanese HE.
Programme 2.6. Increase participation in International and Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE).
Programme 2.7. Conduct External Review for HEIs in Lebanon.
Programme 2.8. Develop and implement Lebanese Qualifications Framework (LQF).
Programme 2.9. Establish sustainable system for continuous revision and development of Higher Education Qualifications in relation to job market.
Programme 2.10. Establish process for Recognition of Professional Qualifications.
Programme 2.11. Review and develop higher education programs based on the Quality Assurance Framework, the National Qualifications Framework and related procedures.
Programme 2.12. Ratify Arab States Convention on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications and promote bilateral and multilateral conventions on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications and Diplomas.
Programme 2.13. Join ENIC-NARIC Network.

Programme 2.1. Establish the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA).

Establishment of the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA) is an urgent and necessary programme action. The LQAA will be established and operate fully independently of Government and the Ministry, and all external influences, and be seen to be independent in all its functions and decision-making, in line with international standards. It will facilitate the establishment of a quality culture. It will build on and further develop local expertise and resources relative to evaluation and quality processes.

● Timely Review of the Draft Legislation

Establishment of the LQAA requires legislation. This can be a complex and complicated process in addition to the complexity associated with setting up a new agency, and developing and approving the policies and procedures. However, the draft law for a National Quality Assurance Agency has been under discussion since 2011.

It is therefore timely that a systematic review of the draft law be undertaken to take account of stakeholder views and to ensure that the proposed legislation is in line with international best practice. The review should be time-limited and undertaken by a small team comprised of national and international experts. The review team should report directly to the Director

General of Higher Education (DGHE). If the DGHE has not been appointed, then the review team should report to the Minister.

● **Setting Up the LQAA**

- The legislative framework and policies and procedures will be in line with international best practice as identified by ENQA or INQAAHE. See Appendix 1.
- The Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA) should be legally independent from external, including governmental, influence. This is considered paramount. See principles of a quality assurance framework in Appendix 2.
- The LQAA will report directly to the Director General of Higher Education as illustrated in Figure 4 (Priority Area 1) above.
- Upon passage of the legislation, the Minister will establish the independent Board of the LQAA, the composition of which should reflect its independence. One suggests:
 - The Board should be composed of 6-9 members of which at least one-third of members should be international non-Lebanese experts.
 - Every effort will be made to recruit international members from a variety of different countries. International experts bring the benefits of an international perspective to the process and the issues.
 - Board members, international and Lebanese, should be selected on the basis of competences and ethics, and not on the basis of representation of particular communities or institutions. S/he should normally be expected to have worked in national and international quality assurance contexts.
 - Overall Board membership will be composed with a view to balance of gender, broad discipline areas and types of university.
 - Membership of the Board should be time-limited, with each member appointed for a period 5 years. Only one period of renewal is possible.
 - The chairperson of the Board should be one of the Board members and elected by the members themselves.
 - A student representative should be included among the members.

Programme 2.2. Develop and implement a Quality Assurance Framework and regulations.

This will include the following aspects:³⁰

- Establish guidelines which set out national expectations for quality assurance and accreditation.
- Establish and implement policies and procedures for external quality assurance of institutions.
- Require all higher education institutions (HEI), public and private, operating in or seeking to operate in Lebanon to be reviewed and accredited in accordance with national policies and procedures, with the authority to withdraw approval from HEIs operating beyond the QA regulations.

³⁰ Further details available in Appendix 2

- Promote and support innovation and continuous improvement and enhancement in providers' quality assurance methods.
- Collaborate and engage with and collect feedback from, key stakeholders on policies and quality assurance guidelines.
- Publish quality assurance review reports, including the outcomes of programme, provider, thematic and whole-of-system reviews and requiring providers to do the same in respect of their own institution.

Programme 2.3. Establish Quality Assurance operational process.

To strengthen the existing licensing/accreditation system, a two-stage integrated and mandatory Quality Assurance Approval Process will be introduced incorporating both the initial institutional licensing/accreditation and quality assurance processes. Stage 1 will review and approve institutional capacity and quality assurance procedures. If successful, the institution will receive approval for a defined scope of provision, i.e., a defined set of parameters within which it can then apply for programme validation. Stage 2 will review the provider's application for programme validation within the scope of provision approved at Stage 1. This process should be clearly presented in all policies and procedures, and publicly communicated.

Both stages involve external review by an independent panel of 5-6 people. Panels for the institutional and programme reviews should comprise Lebanese and international reviewers, of which international experts should comprise at least 50% of members. International experts bring the benefits of an international perspective to the process and the issues/field. Appointment of all panel members should include subject experts and quality assurance experts as appropriate to evaluate the proposed programme. Consideration should be given to having relevant industry/civil society members and students/graduates.

The entire review process should be held regularly, approximately every 5-7 years, to ensure continuous improvement and monitoring. Oversight of the entire process will be the responsibility of the LQAA.

- *Stage 1 is a Quality and Capacity Evaluation.* It reviews resources (human, physical, financial); governance structures; and quality assurance structures, policies and procedures. If successful, the institution will have received approval for a defined scope of provision, i.e., a defined range of qualifications and fields of study within which it can then apply for programme validation.
- *Stage 2 is a Programme Validation Evaluation.* It reviews the quality of the education and training programmes being offered against the level of award in the context of the Lebanese Qualifications Framework, the education context, and mode of delivery (including collaborative, transnational and e-learning). Emphasis is on the quality of the student learning environment and experience and the standards of the qualification as well as the whole quality system are reviewed. Additional reviews are required for each programme.

Programme 2.4 Establish Lebanese Register of Quality Assurance.

This will be an official and public register of all accredited institutions and programmes in Lebanon to ensure maximum accountability and public transparency. Having undergone an external quality assurance review will be a prerequisite for being listed on the Register, and being able to recruit Lebanese and international students.

This will provide considerable re-assurance to people in Lebanon and boost the country's international standing. It will provide an important set of information for when Lebanon decides to join the ENIC-NARIC network (see Programme 2.13 below).

Programme 2.5. Produce sector report on the Quality of Lebanese HE.

A Sector Report will be published at the conclusion of the External Quality Assurance Review process identified above in Programme 2.7. It will highlight shared issues and challenges across the system, such as overall capacity and capability, institutional missions and differentiation, etc., and thus facilitate a dialogue among key stakeholders and the government.

The outcome of the review should be used to inform policy and quality assurance policies and processes, and as well facilitating a process of quality enhancement across the higher education system. It will also aid decision-making about the relevance of Lebanese higher education with regard to graduate employment/unemployment and the needs of the Lebanese society and economy, and the size of the higher education system and whether or not there is sufficient institutional diversity and student learning opportunities and programme choice. It will inform decisions about the level of collaboration, complementarity and unnecessary duplication within the overall offering. It will also provide the basis for a strong public statement on the quality of Lebanese higher education.

Programme 2.6. Increase participation in International and Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE).

Lebanon will develop and strengthen international and collaborative relationships with other accreditation and quality assurance organisations in the region, with the European Union and internationally in order to keep abreast of international good practice.

Lebanon will actively increase its participation in the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE).³¹

- Networking with national quality assurance councils in the MENA region will provide the opportunity to learn and share best practice and underpin the development of policy and practices in Lebanon to ensure the country adopts the highest standards of quality.
- Networking can also provide the opportunity for training and development thereby boosting capacity and capability in quality assurance while also enhancing the visibility and credibility of Lebanese higher education.
- Attendance at meetings of ENQA and INQAHEE would be important for increasing knowledge and understanding of quality assurance and keeping abreast of trends.

³¹ <http://www.anqahe.org>

Under Programme 2.12, Lebanon will ratify the Arab States Convention on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications.³² This is especially important for Lebanon given its history of migration and attraction of students into the higher education system from across the region, and the number of refugees in the country. Moreover, it promotes the recognition of refugees' qualifications, even in cases where documentary evidence is lacking.

Under Programme 2.13, Lebanon will join the ENIC-NARIC Network which is a joint initiative of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO to assist in recognition of qualifications.³³

Programme 2.7. Conduct External Review for HEIs in Lebanon.

Given the complex legislative and set-up arrangements associated with the LQAA (Programme 2.1), an External Quality Assurance Review will be undertaken of each higher education institution by a single international QA agency appointed by the DGHE with the advice of the Policy Implementation Committee (PIC).

This approach has the considerable merit of being undertaken quickly and simultaneously to the passage of legislation and the establishment of the LQAA with all the complexities involved. It should be followed by a review of all academic programmes.

The objectives is to:

- Reassure Lebanon as to the quality of its higher education system and graduates of the value and quality of their qualification;
- Present an important signal to the international community about the overall international standing of the higher education system;
- Support both the Government and HEIs to strengthen the culture of quality and evaluation and provide public accountability and transparency and boost Lebanon's international standing.

The external review will be carried out as follows:

- The review will be undertaken by a single designated international agency recognised by the Ministry on the advice of the Policy Implementation Committee (PIC), to be followed by a review of all academic programmes.
- The comprehensive review of all Lebanese higher education institutions will include all public and private institutions, regardless of whether or not they have already obtained external accreditation.
- The review should be undertaken by a single International Quality Assurance Agency. This will bring establish a definitive baseline standard of quality for Lebanon. It will also ensure independence and legitimacy to the process especially in current circumstances where there has been no national quality assurance system operating.
- The international QA Agency will be internationally accredited preferably via ENQA.³⁴

³² <https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention>

³³ <https://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx>; <https://www.enic-naric.net/arab-states.aspx>

³⁴ It is recommended that the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) conduct the review of the Lebanese Higher Education system. IEP is an independent QA agency established by but fully independent of the European Universities Association (EUA). It is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). IEP

- It will have significant expertise and experience undertaking sectoral reviews in circumstances where a quality culture is nascent and there is either a new or no existing national agency. The agency should also be fully cognisant of the Lebanese context, and experienced with international practices, e.g., US, French, UK, European etc.
- The review will use a common approach and understanding of the issues which will establish a single independent quality benchmark for Lebanese higher education.
- The work will commence not later than six months after the publication of the policy and will be completed within two years of that date, and be managed by the PIC.

There are two alternative approaches to having the review undertaken by a single international quality agency. However, each of these alternative approaches have significant disadvantages – and therefore are not recommended:

- Alternative Approach 1: The current system permits universities to choose an international agency of their choice leading to a situation in which different international agencies undertake the quality assurance reviews. This approach effectively creates a market in quality assurance practice which undermines the establishment of a common quality assurance culture and standard for Lebanon.

In addition, the absence of a national register of quality assured HEIs and programmes creates considerable uncertainty regarding the current QA status. This uncertainty pertains to all HEIs and programmes.

Such an approach carries negative implications for the country's international standing.

- Alternative Approach 2: A quality review of the higher education system would be undertaken once the LQAA has been established. The process of establishing a LQAA is complex and has been delayed for years. Choosing this approach will likely and unnecessarily delay the external quality assurance review of Lebanon's higher education institutions with implications for the country's international standing. This approach should only be chosen if a time-limited decision to establish the LQAA has been agreed.

Therefore, it is strongly recommended that a comprehensive quality assurance review is undertaken by a single agency. It is also strongly recommended that the external review by a single agency includes all HEIs in Lebanon, public and private, regardless of their current presumed status. It is essential that there is a single process which sets a common benchmark for all HEIs, public and private. HEIs may seek international accreditation if they wish, but that should be in addition to this process.

Decisions as to the status of institutional accreditation will be made on the basis of the outcome of the review by the LQAA or by the Director General of Higher Education (DGHE) if the former is not yet established.

undergoes external review coordinated by ENQA every five years, the last review being in 2019. The IEP has considerable experience undertaking sectoral "coordinating evaluations" having completed reviews for Serbia (2002), Bosnia-Herzegovina (2004), Slovakia (2008), Turkey (2008), Portugal (2006-2008), Romania (2014), Montenegro (2014, 2018) and North Macedonia (2018).

Further information can be found at: <https://www.iep-qa.org/reports-publications.html>; https://www.iep-qa.org/how-iep-works.html#textualsection_162. See direct link to coordinated reports: <https://www.iep-qa.org/reports-publications.html>

Programme 2.8. Develop and implement Lebanese Qualifications Framework (LQF).

The objective is to provide formalised structures with learning level descriptors and qualifications about learning outcomes, publicly accessible to all learners, parents, employers, and society in general.

- The LQF should seek to provide a single reference point to compare qualifications nationally, regionally and internationally.
- The LQF should set out what each qualification expects learners to know, understand and are able to do. It also sets out qualification's pathways from one qualification level to the next.
- The LQF provides guidance to educators, learners, employers and wider society regarding qualifications levels and expectation of learning outcomes.
- This should be aligned with the Qualification Framework model proposed by ANQAHE in order to provide a regional benchmark of qualified graduates, and provide the basis for mutual recognition of qualifications.³⁵
- The LQAA is responsible for developing, promoting and maintaining the LQF. It also facilitates the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Programme 2.9. Establish sustainable system for continuous revision and development of Higher Education Qualifications in relation to job market.

The world is experiencing a rapid change in labour markets, with rapid differences in the nature and requirements of jobs. It is noticeable that a significant number of professions disappeared and others emerged during short periods of time. The higher education sector must be present and keep pace with regard to the ability to develop its programmes, majors and curricula in a way that secures for its graduates the qualifications required for the labour market.

This sector must be a pioneer in anticipating professions and developing existing jobs, based on the cumulative knowledge and scientific research in various fields of knowledge, especially applied ones. To this end, a sustainable system of reviewing the outputs of higher education must be established in the light of labour market changes and requirements.

Programme 2.10. Establish process for recognition of professional qualifications.

A review will be undertaken on the approach to be adopted for the recognition of professional qualifications and the regulation of professions for people seeking employment in Lebanon. There should be a direct link between this work and the quality assurance approval process. The objective is to ensure that an individual has the appropriate qualification or specific training in order to practise that profession or use a professional title. This ensures that those providing services have the appropriate knowledge and training.

Programme 2.11. Review and develop higher education programmes based on the quality assurance framework, the national qualifications framework and related procedures.

³⁵ https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-09/session_4b_arab_qualif_framework_tariq_alsindi_4th_acqf_plw_0.pdf

A comprehensive review of all educational programmes currently operating in Lebanon will be undertaken following the review of all institutions (public and private), as proposed in Programme 2.7. The objectives are to:

- Reassure Lebanon as to the quality of its higher education system, and present an important signal to the international community;
- Support both the Government and HEIs to strengthen the culture of quality and evaluation and provide public accountability and transparency;
- The review will ensure a common approach and understanding of the issues and help establish a single independent quality benchmark for Lebanese higher education.

The review will be undertaken under the auspices of the PIC or LQAA as the new national agency for quality assurance, if it has been established at this point. The LQAA will build on domestic expertise whilst working in partnership with an internationally accredited quality assurance agency which will bring additional independence and legitimacy to the process.

Programme 2.12. Ratify Arab states convention on mutual recognition of Qualifications and promote bilateral and multilateral conventions on mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas.

Programme 2.13. Join ENIC-NARIC Network.

Chapter 6.

Priority Area 3: Increase Funding and Monitor Performance

Develop a policy approach to funding higher education in Lebanon along two dimensions – the immediate needs of the sector and a longer-term policy direction.

The higher education system, like so much of the economic and social life of Lebanon and its people, is going through a period of severe crisis affecting, among other aspects, its funding situation. Later in this chapter some strategies are proposed with the objective of helping the universities get through this critical period. However, the primary analysis in this chapter sets out policy options for Lebanon that are not crisis driven, but are more long term for a sustainable system.

6.1 International Approaches to Financing Higher Education

Even as higher education assumes greater importance across the world, many higher education systems face serious challenges maintaining their quality and relevance, increasing efficiency and effectiveness, strengthening societal impact, and securing equity across disciplines and staff and students. New higher education financing models are being developed in many countries as policy responds to these challenges.

In Europe, the European Commission in *“Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation”* (2006) identified the importance of funding higher education, suggesting the need to *“reduce the funding gap and make funding work more effectively in education and research”*. It proposed at least 2% of GDP be spent on higher education. It also raised the issue of performance-based funding, stating: *“Universities should be funded more for what they do than for what they are, by focusing funding on relevant outputs rather than inputs.”*³⁶ This was followed by *“Supporting Growth and Jobs – An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe’s Higher Education Systems”* (COM, 2011) which recommended the introduction of funding mechanisms linked to performance to introduce an element of competition to improve the governance of the higher education system.³⁷

There are different approaches to financing higher education. The World Bank operates the categorisation: (i) basic funding; (ii) performance funding; and (iii) innovation-/profile-oriented funding.³⁸ Countries may also try to reflect notional or expected costs of different

³⁶ European Commission. 2006. “Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation.” (COM) 2006 208 final. Communication to the Council and the European Parliament. Brussels. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52006DC0208>. p7

³⁷ European Commission. 2011. “Supporting Growth and Jobs – an Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe’s Higher Education Systems.” COM(2011) 567 final. Vol. 20.9.2011. European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/com0911_en.pdf.

³⁸ World Bank. 2014. “Higher Education Financing in Latvia: Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses.” Washington D.C. http://viaa.gov.lv/files/news/24067/lv_r2_strategic_fit_18april_vfinal.pdf; Ziegele, F. (2013). European

fields of study in their funding models. For example, high-cost subjects – such as medicine, engineering or certain natural sciences – often receive higher levels of funding than lower-cost fields such as the humanities and social sciences.

Basic or core funding refers to the amount of public funding that remains largely stable over a specific period of time. The aim is to provide predictable and reliable financing that covers the main part of operational costs, thereby enabling HEIs to perform their core tasks of teaching and research. In most European systems, public authorities distribute basic funding to HEIs through a block grant to cover teaching, ongoing operational costs, and in some instances core research activity. The overall amount of the block grant may be determined in different ways, for example on the basis of student numbers and/or through negotiation, incrementally on a historical basis, or via a funding formula.

Performance-based funding (PBF) has become one of the commonest trends in public funding of higher education worldwide over the last two decades. The main purpose is to link a percentage of institutional funding to outputs or outcomes. PBF is considered beneficial because it gives governments greater leverage, while increasing the accountability of universities over their spending of public funding. PBF is thought to “*stimulate organisations to perform better on specific tasks of their missions, but also from a systemic perspective, it allows for the allocation of resources to the actors that make most productive use of them, while encouraging underperforming actors to increase their performance and hence to improve the efficiency and performance of the system overall*”.³⁹ Even when the share of funding involved in PBF is small, organisations may be influenced by other considerations, such as local or international reputation.

Over recent years, performance compacts/contracts have become a common feature in many European higher education systems, in the US and in Canada. These set out specific quantitative or qualitative goals that institutions will seek to achieve in a given time period and which may be (but are not necessarily) linked to institutional funding. Performance contracts are currently in use in 15 out of 22 European systems.⁴⁰ Some countries have linked PBF to “negotiated” performance agreements (Netherlands and Ireland), outcomes agreements (Scotland), or strategic mandate agreements (Ontario, Canada). Most US states also allocate organisational funding for universities based on a formula which considers output.⁴¹

Innovation/profile-oriented funding operates, *inter alia*, as targeted or earmarked funding, competitive or strategic funding, project-based funding or as part of what may be called an

Trends in Performance-Oriented Funding. In Bergan, S., Egron-Polak, E., Kohler, J. & Purser, L. (Eds.): Leadership and Governance in Higher Education - Handbook for Decision-makers and Administrators, 1/2013. Berlin: Raabe, p71–88.

³⁹ Jonkers, Koen, and Thomas Zacharewicz. 2015. “Performance Based Funding: A Comparative Assessment of Their Use and Nature in EU Member States.” EUR 27477 EN. JRC Science for Policy Report. Luxembourg. <https://doi.org/10.2791/134058>. p9

⁴⁰ Arnhold, Nina, Jussi Kivistö, Hans Vossensteyn, Jason Weaver, and Frank Ziegele. 2018. “World Bank Support to Higher Education in Latvia: Volume 1 - System Level Funding.” Washington D.C.: World Bank p247. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29740>

⁴¹ OECD. 2020. “Resourcing Higher Education.” Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. <https://doi.org/10.1787/735e1f44-en>. p92

excellence initiative. All these instruments basically aim to support and incentivise innovation and change in curriculum, teaching and learning or research or to support particular national strategic objectives. The latter may include the provision of programmes in particular disciplines that relate to national skills priorities or collaboration between institutions to increase efficiencies.

According to the World Bank, good funding models should promote sustainability (stability and continuity), legitimisation (fairness and transparency), and autonomy of HEIs. Table 6 below describes the characteristics of a “good” higher education funding model.⁴²

Table 6. Features of a “good” higher education funding model.

High-Level Goals	Targets
Strategic Direction	Promote national strategies Promote institutional profiles Create performance rewards and sanctions Create a competitive environment
Incentive Orientation	Provide clear, non-fragmented incentives Avoid undesired effects Balance ex post and ex ante performance orientation*
Sustainability	Stability* Guarantee continuity in funding mechanisms Allow long-term planning* Take into account cost differences Promote risk-spreading and management*
Legitimation	Provide unambiguous and balanced funding structures Make funding transparent Support the perception of fairness Allocate lump sums* Guarantee academic freedom
Autonomy and freedom	Implement an adequate level of regulation Guarantee autonomy of internal resource allocation* Promote accessibility of diverse income sources*
Practical feasibility	Use available data Ensure administrative efficiency Respect methodological standards Ensure coherence with funding levels and steering approaches

* Only relevant for institution, not for student, funding.

⁴² World Bank. 2014. “Higher Education Financing in Latvia: Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses.” Washington D.C. p46-51. http://viaa.gov.lv/files/news/24067/lv_r2_strategic_fit_18april_vfinal.pdf p50-51

6.2 Higher Education Financing in Lebanon current position and proposed reforms

● *The Lebanese University*

Core funding

Only the Lebanese University receives public funding. The amount allocated annually is calculated by reference to the previous year's funding and the availability of public funding generally. It is not based on the number of students at any one time. It is core funding as recognised in higher education funding models internationally and is a block grant. The latter means that the University has autonomy in how to allocate its budget across its functions and activities.

It is best practice internationally to provide funding allocations to HEIs that are rationally derived based on clear criteria, rather than as at present in the case of the Lebanese University on the basis of historical allocations. Also, the current approach to funding the University is not consistent with some of the key elements of a funding system outlined above. In particular, it does not accord with elements relating to strategic direction, transparency, or allowing for long term planning.

Funding allocations to the University do not at present reflect the relative costs of different disciplines and levels of study. Aligning the funding allocated to HEIs with the actual cost of programmes is usually achieved by carrying out a unit costing process. Unit costs are most often used to set a number of price tariffs or rates of funding-per-student which provide the basis for a block grant allocation. Such a unit costing exercise for the Lebanese University would reveal the relative costs of each programme and allow for differentiated support to be given reflecting those differentials.

Funding on the basis of student numbers and disciplines accords with the internationally recognised principle that "funding follows the student".

Performance based funding

In addition to reforming the basis on which core funding is allocated to the Lebanese University it is recommended that a model of performance-based funding be introduced for the University. The over-arching objective of introducing a performance-based funding model would be to enhance the performance of the University as a cornerstone of Lebanese higher education, given its approximate 40% of total student enrolments. As such it would better align the University's activities and outputs with the objectives of the Government for the social and economic development of the country.

The following principles, based upon international good practice should underpin the model of performance-based funding.

1. The performance evaluation process should provide for the University meeting national objectives in ways that are coherent with its history and mission.
2. The ground rules must be established at the outset and adhered to. These include clarity on the beginning, middle and end point of the performance cycle, definitions, descriptors and the assessment and implementation process.

3. There must be recognition that while some aspects of the University's performance are discernible in the short (1 to 2 year) term, many are not.
4. Where institutional performance is dependent on matters outside of the control of the University this must be considered.
5. Because much of the evaluation is concerned with mission and strategy, qualitative judgments will be required.
6. A peer review process is required. This must be, and be seen to be, credible, expert and objective.
7. The reward/penalty structure must incentivise performance without destabilising the University.

Consultation with the University would be essential in designing a performance-based funding model. This will instil trust in the University that this is not an exercise in increasing government control and an appreciation of the benefits that a performance funding model can bring to it in terms of:

- Clarity in the relationship between the University and the Government in terms of mutual expectations;
- Better alignment between national objectives and the University's strategy and agendas with enhanced impact on social and economic development;
- Enhanced capacity for strategic development in the University;
- Empowering senior management in the University to bring about change in their institution;
- Increased transparency and accountability within the University;
- Increased transparency and accountability to the government and the general public.

● **Private Universities**

Private universities enrol approximately 60% of the Lebanese higher education student population. As such, they exercise a powerful influence on the system, on the academic outcomes and on the social and economic impact of higher education. They also of course have enormous influence on the lives of their students, graduates and their families. They receive no public funding, relying primarily on tuition fees paid by students and their families. These fees vary widely depending on the university and/or the discipline. In a small number of cases, private universities have additional income through foundations, based either in Lebanon and/or abroad. Some of them also receive public and international funding through LNCSR programs.

That such a large proportion of higher education students receive no support from public funds is a weakness in the Lebanese higher education system; so too is the relative weakness of the regulation of these institutions. Under Strategic Objective 2 (Quality Assurance) issues of quality of the learner experience and outcomes from private universities are discussed and options set out for how the system can be improved.

In the case of funding, however, the situation is complicated by the fact that the institutions are privately owned and there is therefore a natural reluctance on the part of the Government to provide them with public funding or risk interfering with private property rights. But there remains the fact that they form a major part of the higher education system and if that system

is to deliver the kind of social and economic outcomes that Lebanon needs then it is necessary to bring the private universities into the effort.

The next section outlines a proposal for how this could be done through the creation of a special fund open to all universities.

6.3 Programme actions

The objective of the actions proposed is to develop a policy approach to funding higher education in Lebanon along two dimensions in order to meet the immediate needs of the higher education sector in Lebanon, and to develop a longer-term policy direction.

In doing so the aim is create a funding environment in Lebanon that will support a sustainable system, making its contribution to national strategic objectives, while recognising that the universities also need support in getting through the current funding crisis. There are four programme actions.

Table 7. Overview of Priority Area 3 Programmes.

Strategic Pillar 1. Steering the Higher Education System.
PRIORITY AREA 3: Increase Funding and Monitor Performance.
Develop a policy approach to funding higher education in Lebanon along two dimensions – the immediate needs of the sector and a longer-term policy direction.
Programme 3.1. Reform the funding model for the Lebanese University.
Programme 3.2. Introduce a model of Performance Based Funding for the Lebanese University.
Programme 3.3. Establish a Strategic Fund for all Universities.
Programme 3.4. Introduce measures to support the higher education system through the current crises.

Programme 3.1. Reform the Funding Model for the Lebanese University.

The objective is to implement the principle that “funding follows the student” thus providing the Lebanese University with funding that more accurately reflects actual costs of provision and providing the University with greater funding stability, enabling better planning and resource management and supporting overall quality improvement. This would also give to the Ministry a more accurate understanding of the cost of higher education provision in its publicly funded University, which could inform budgetary decisions at Government level.

To that end:

- (i) funding will be provided on the basis of the total number of students registered in the University at undergraduate and masters level at a specific date each year;
- (ii) funding allocations to the University will reasonably reflect the relative costs of different disciplines and levels of study, and a unit costing exercise will be conducted to establish those costs.

Programme 3.2. Introduce a model of Performance Based Funding for the Lebanese University.

The objective of introducing a PBF model is to ensure that the outcomes from the Lebanese University are in line with the national objectives of Lebanon. It will be developed in line with international best practice as outlined earlier.

Programme 3.3. Establish a Strategic Fund for all Universities.

The objective of the strategic fund is to better align higher education activities and outcomes across the full higher education system (public and private) with national policy priorities and to use the fund as an incentive and support for the development and implementation of innovative, effective approaches to specific national priorities.

The process of accessing the fund will be competitive with only the best proposals being funded. A qualifying criterion for access to the fund will be a positive review of quality through the processes set out under Strategic Objective 2.

The following will be the key elements of the fund:

- Well-structured and managed consultation with the HEIs on design and implementation. Close engagement with the institutions from the outset on the design of the fund and implementation issues will create a higher level of shared understanding which is more likely to lead to proactive engagement with the fund and successful initiatives.
- The amount of the funding to be allocated to the fund needs to be sufficient to encourage participation and competition.
- The areas of focus for the fund need to be:
 - Clearly articulated by Government and related to national social and economic priorities;
 - Small in number. If too many areas of focus are set out there is a risk of lack of focus, leading to poor outcomes. In practice there could be just one area, at least for a pilot programme;
 - Stated in sufficiently broad terms to allow for innovative approaches. In the context of Lebanon focus could be on areas such as improving the alignment between HE and skills needs of the economy;
 - HEI proposals should be consistent with their mission and competences and based on a current strategic plan and the university has had a positive quality review. These requirements will ensure that any applicant HEI has a current strategic plan in place and that it is capable of delivering quality outcomes.
- The marking system for proposals should assign a proportion of marks to collaboration both cross disciplinary within institutions and cross institutional. The latter in particular will ensure greater impact of projects selected. The greatest level of collaboration would be projects that encompass the entire higher education system in a region or nationally.
- Assessment of projects should consider the capacity for mainstreaming. This is in keeping with the overall objective of better aligning higher education activities and outcomes with national policy priorities. A successful exercise would be characterised

by the number of funded projects that, although a proposal of one or a number of HEIs, can be extended out to a wider group or the entire HE system.

- Selection of projects must be transparent and fair. This requires at the outset clear articulation of the criteria and marking system and the putting in place of an independent assessment panel. This panel should have a majority of its members from outside Lebanon.
- The period over which the funding is to be applied:
 - This will be particular to each project and must be agreed with the HEI at the outset;
 - In a multi-annual project, there should be some on-going review annually to ensure that the project is on track and, if not, to adjust the project or withdraw funding before it is wasted;
 - Final review - long enough to allow for success.
- The metrics used to assess performance against project objectives need to be clear and agreed at the outset and be few in number to avoid excessive bureaucracy and cost.
- Support from bodies and organisations such as business and enterprise should be encouraged by allocating marks for such engagement. Alternatively, such engagement could be made a qualifying element in the project.

Programme 3.4. Introduce measures to support the higher education system through the current crises.

The objective of these actions is to support the universities through the current funding crisis so that Lebanese higher education will emerge in a position to provide the people of Lebanon with a strong and effective higher education system to help them re-build their country and its damaged systems.

The actions are based on:

- Acknowledging the urgent need for funding but the difficulty of getting additional financial support from public funds or privately from Lebanese citizens, and the fact that the present investment of universities has lost more than 92% of its value making it nearly insignificant.
- Recognising the existence of physical assets in the universities that are largely unchanged by the crisis and so are still available to the sector.
- Acknowledging that Lebanese higher education needs to do more to contribute to socio-economic development and the development of a modern knowledge-based economy and exploring how the crisis can be turned into an opportunity.
- The need to create a dynamic in the higher education sector where all institutions will act in a more coherent and coordinated network of differentiated institutions.

There are two sub-programme actions:

● Establish a Higher Education Consultative Forum

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education will convene a Forum of all universities as soon as practical to work together on ways in which they can provide mutual support. Universities are to be encouraged to form alliances at regional level where it would be

practical to share such resources as access to lectures and tutoring, doctoral education and training (See Priority Area 7) laboratories and other facilities as well as best practice in the use of technology in teaching and learning.

● **Establish the Higher Education Support and Renewal Fund**

The fund will have as its objective to support the higher education institutions through the crises and encourage them to take the kind of innovative actions that will position them well to contribute to social and economic development and the knowledge society when the crises ease. The fund will focus in four areas of immediate necessity:

- Funding supports to students, such as scholarships and support with IT.
- Co-financing the maintenance of infrastructure and facilities and the acquisition of consumables.
- Support for teaching and learning, including the wider and more effective use of IT.
- Co-financing RDI projects that can have more direct and immediate socio-economic impact.

Access to the fund by a university must comply with stated criteria, such as:

- Institutions and programmes must be quality reviewed.
- The institution requesting support must demonstrate its capacity to use the resources efficiently and its preparedness to share the resources and its facilities with peer institutions.
- The institution must be prepared to place its resources and facilities at the service of the wider community.
- In the case of projects relating to teaching and learning and research the fund will prioritise those that demonstrate innovative approaches in support of national social or economic priorities. Such priorities could include the environment, water resources, health and refugee training.
- Priority would be given to proposals involving collaboration in a consortium or a network of universities and external socio-economic partners.

The amount of the fund will be based on an assessment of needs nationally and an estimate of the costs. Needs could include salary costs, the maintenance of infrastructure and facilities and the acquisition of consumables. The fund would be established by way of a loan or grant from an international institution with the potential for contributions from philanthropy and from Lebanese public funds if circumstances permit.

In order to ensure that funding provided will be well used the Ministry will administer the fund and monitor the use of any funding provided to a university, its outcomes and impact. Receiving universities will be required to have adequate processes in place to account for any funding they receive and to engage with the Ministry's reporting structures.

Chapter 7.

Priority Area 4: Higher Education Information and Data

Develop a comprehensive higher education management information system (HEMIS) to foster informed decision-making processes.

7.1 Why HE Information and Data Systems Matter

Good strategic management of the HE system and institutions relies upon having a reliable management information system, overseen by the Government and utilised by all HEIs. A Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) is a system for collecting, processing, analysing and reporting on data (qualitative and quantitative) about the higher education system. It provides a way for Government, HEIs and the public including employers and potential students, to track the overall performance of the system. It should provide essential information to support regulation, monitoring, decision-making, policy-analysis and formulation, planning, monitoring and management at all levels of an education system. It facilitates resource allocation and underpins the introduction of a performance-based funding system (PBF). In addition, a HEMIS system aids compliance, reduces risk, and improves trust – between the Government, HEIs and the public. It can also aid student choice regarding which institution and course of study to pursue. Without such a system, it is extremely difficult to plan or monitor, to evaluate relevance and quality, to improve outcomes, allocate resources or assess societal impact and value-for-money. It is a vital instrument for national accountability and transparency.

A Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) provides a comprehensive, integrated set of relevant, reliable, unambiguous and timely data and information to support Government and higher education institutions' responsibilities. It aims to collect, integrate, process, maintain, analyse and disseminate data and information. Adoption of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 with its emphasis on equity and inclusion, lifelong learning, and the need to measure learning outcomes expands the range of data that needs to be collected and managed, thus placing additional complex data demands on Government and higher education systems.

A good national data system relies on:

- Being operated and supervised by the Government, and implemented and utilised by all HEIs, public and private, to ensure its integrity;
- Clarity and agreement by all stakeholders as to the key data points required to establish a national dashboard with agreed, well-described and clear data definitions and collection methodologies that pertain to all HEIs;
- Meaningful data, well-aligned with higher education profile and activities, and Government priorities;
- A national system for graduate and employer feedback, and a process to track graduates are also important;

- Capability to underpin the on-going work of higher education institutions, Government ministries and other agencies;
- Secure digital platform, with good data collection and management, interoperable with other national data systems as appropriate, and the capacity for data analysis and reporting.

Development of a HEMIS for Lebanon should include all of the following elements. However, it is important to state that the system will have to be phased over several years. It is also worth noting that a HEMIS for Lebanon is not the union of all data available at universities but is rather a data warehouse facilitating the understanding of the different activities conducted and their outcomes.

Elements of a well-integrated HEMIS for Lebanon should include:

- Information on the student population, including numbers, programmes, attainment and completion rates, EDI, etc.;
- Comprehensive information on student progression and learning pathways and careers;
- Comprehensive record of staff in the universities;
- RDI activities, outcomes and impact;
- HEI services provided;
- Financial information;
- Service-to-society/civic engagement activities.

A survey of student experience of higher education, a process to track graduates and processes for graduate and employer feedback would further enhance a comprehensive system. Once data is collected from different institutions, it enables relevant conclusions, planning and actions to be taken at national level. It makes it possible to analyse the efficiency and effectiveness of the system, and individual institutions.⁴³

HEMIS data should be adapted and made accessible to all levels of decision-making of the education system. It should be flexible enough to respond to the education system's present data demands, while at the same time anticipating future demands. It is crucial that data systems adapt to changes in both national and international educational agendas.

Higher Education Management Information Systems are complex projects. Systematic gathering of information about education activity and quality, and the choice of proxy indicators, requires careful consideration, consultation and development over time.

7.2 Overview of Higher Education Information and Data in Lebanon

Law 285/2014 recognises the importance of information and data about higher education as part of the licensing, monitoring and evaluation functions of the Ministry and the various committees. However, limited accurate and verifiable information is currently available about the Lebanese higher education system. This includes information and data on student enrolment, performance and outcomes; academic, research and other staff – including qualifications; research, development and innovation (activities and outcomes and impacts),

⁴³ Marmolejo, F. (2016). *What Matters Most for Tertiary Education: A Framework Paper* (No. 11). <https://doi.org/10.1596/26516>;

and societal engagement activities. Some universities operate their own systems of data collection and record keeping and share this information with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education when requested. Thus, the Ministry is reliant on institutionally generated data, its accuracy and rigour, and what information institutions decide to share with the Ministry and in what format.

The absence of a consistent and comprehensive information and data system undermines the level of strategic governance appropriate for national or institutional level decision-making and strategic planning – with the capability to track and compare. It hinders information gathering about student access and attainment especially for equalising opportunities and outcomes for students and informing planning to meet income student needs. This includes information about transition pathways between schools, vocational education and higher education, and into employment.

A good working HEMIS, even one which is emergent, is key to the development of a good quality assurance system in Lebanon. There are risks also for recognition and equivalences processes, and for institutional licensing and external and internal quality assurance of the higher education system.

7.3 Programme Actions

Given the strategic importance to Lebanon of a HEMIS and the complexities and costs involved with setting up such a system, it is recommended that the Council for Higher Education implement a phased approach along the following lines.

Table 8. Overview of Priority Area 4 Programmes.

Strategic Pillar 1. Steering the Higher Education System.
PRIORITY AREA 4: Higher Education Information and Data.
Develop a comprehensive higher education management information system (HEMIS) to foster informed decision-making processes.
Programme 4.1. Develop the parameters and system architecture of a HEMIS system for Lebanon.
Programme 4.2. Develop a Student Record System (SRS).
Programme 4.3. Develop and Implement a Graduate Outcomes Survey and an Employer Survey.
Programme 4.4. Design and implement a platform to connect Higher Education to employment sector, to enhance labour market skills and employability, and to forecast skills for new and future jobs and professions.

Programme 4.1. Develop the parameters and system architecture of a HEMIS system for Lebanon

The objective of this component is to improve the capacity of the overall higher education system by developing a management information system to collect, analyse, and disseminate data and information for monitoring and decision-making purposes and interventions, including among others, student learning outcomes, employability, gender and other demographic information. The system should also collect data on research activity, outcomes and impacts.

The aim is to develop the overall framework, identify the indicators, and design the information management system. To achieve this, the Ministry will engage in a series of meetings with countries which have developed a higher education management information system (HEMIS), in order to share lessons and good practices from their experiences. National contexts differ but the opportunity to engage directly with other countries would be extremely helpful in understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with developing a HEMIS system and helping to design a roadmap to implementation.

Creating a comprehensive HEMIS system is a complex and complicated process. It will need to be phased in over many years. It is suggested that Lebanon would consider peer-learning workshops with Finland and Ireland.

Finland has a comprehensive system developed over many years, with full engagement and collaboration with its stakeholders. It includes financial and organisational information, student information, higher education achievements and research activity and publications. The Finnish system also includes student feedback information.⁴⁴

Ireland's HEMIS is at an earlier stage of development than Finland's and as such offers Lebanon a view of an evolving system. Ireland has developed a Student Record System as the first step to developing a more comprehensive system. The system provides extensive interactive reports and analysis on student enrolment, performance, completions, and graduate outcomes. In addition, institutional performance is provided using key performance indicators which provides a system-wide perspective. In parallel, there are three separate surveys: a survey of student engagement, a graduate outcomes survey and an employer survey.⁴⁵

In both countries, there are common data definitions, and all stakeholders use the same definitions and the same data to ensure a common perspective. Steering is from the ministry in the case of Finland and by the Higher Education Authority in Ireland. Liaison with the higher education institutions and other stakeholders has been vital for success. The data is publicly available on websites and can be used by the higher education institutions, students, researchers and the general public. Both systems produce numerous reports and analysis based on the data which aid decision making by government, higher education and external stakeholders.

Based on the diagnostic assessment of what data systems exist at the institutional and ministry level and what is required, this sub-component would support the development of a data integration policy, strategy and action plan. This will include aspects related to data collection, management, linkages with other data systems, security and maintenance as well linkages to other data sources including quality assurance.

Programme 4.2. Develop a Student Record System (SRS).

Given the complexities involved in establishing a HEMIS system, Lebanon will develop a phased approach to implementation based upon an overarching project plan. The first step will be to establish a Student Record System in order to provide a full overview of student

⁴⁴ <https://okm.fi/en/statistics>

⁴⁵ <https://hea.ie/statistics/> ; <https://studentsurvey.ie>

enrolment, registration, progression, completion rates etc. This information is essential so as to oversee and regulate the system, to monitor performance and quality, and to plan for the future. It provides an essential foundation for a quality assurance system and any future financing system.

Programme 4.3. Develop and Implement a Graduate Outcomes Survey and an Employer Survey.

There are several kinds of survey instruments that can aid both higher education institutions and policymakers. For example, many institutions may develop a student feedback system as part of their own internal quality assurance process.

At the national level, Lebanon will establish two different surveys in order to better understand the quality and relevance of education programmes and alignment with societal and labour market requirements.

The Graduate Outcomes Survey should be a national survey capturing information about the activities and perspectives of graduates approximately 12-15 months after they finish their studies. All graduates who completed a course should be asked to take part in the survey. The survey provides comprehensive information about future plans of all graduates and alumni by programme of study and HEI. The results of the survey are used by the institutions for accountability, programme review, and accreditation purposes.⁴⁶ In addition to recording whether the graduate is employed/non-employed or pursuing additional education and training, the survey should seek information about programme relevance, and further skill needs. Consideration should be given to developing a follow-up survey after 3-5 years post-graduation.⁴⁷

An Employer Survey provides useful and valuable information on the views of employers about higher education outcomes. It is generally conducted every 2-3 years and seeks to capture information about employer satisfaction with graduate recruits across a range of workplace and personal attributes, work-readiness, adaptability, as well as skills and knowledge.⁴⁸ The objective is to map skill gaps in order to improve programme and curriculum development and relevance, and to strengthen links between the university and employers.⁴⁹

Together, these surveys will help provide essential information about the relevance of education programmes in terms of alignment with the needs of society and the labour market. Developing these surveys will take time and involve discussion with the key

⁴⁶ <https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/>;
<https://services.fsd.tuni.fi/catalogue/series/37?lang=en>
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/outcomes/students>

⁴⁷ Here is an example of how to design a graduate tracer survey.
https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/CEDE612F00BFF6B3C12581A600278816_Tracer%20studies.pdf

⁴⁸ <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Employer-Survey.pdf>

⁴⁹ See:
https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/C4F32CCE637F754AC12580E6004A6574_Employer%20surveys.pdf

stakeholders. They should be operated across the entire system, and include all HEIs (public and private), and be overseen by the DGHE.

Programme 4.4. Design and implement a platform to connect Higher Education to employment sector, to enhance labour market skills and employability, and to forecast skills for new and future jobs and professions.

Facts and data about the labour markets change steadily, due to emerging needs, population and technological changes, crises and accidents (Corona pandemic, Immigration and displacement...), geopolitical data, etc. This reality requires higher education to accompany and amend policies and plans at all levels, especially with regard to programmes, majors and curricula, adapting them and creating what is necessary according to studies and reliable data that can be relied upon. Hence, it is important to create a platform that brings together all partners, especially the higher education and labour market.

Strategic Pillar 2:
Improving Relevance and Quality Outcomes

Chapter 8.

Priority Area 5: Education, Skills and Relevance

Put in place structures and processes to ensure that the higher education system, individual HEIs and education programmes contribute significantly to the skills needs of the Lebanese economy.

8.1 Strengthening the Quality and Relevance of Higher Education

Higher education has a huge potential and opportunity as well as a societal responsibility to play a much bigger role in the regeneration of Lebanese society and economy. Achieving these goals also helps its own staff, students and graduates to lead successful working and personal lives. This requires much greater collaboration between higher education and the economy to ensure that graduates emerge with skills required for the economy generally and specifically for the green and digital economy as it develops and with greater capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship.⁵⁰

- Society benefits from enhanced human capital through graduate retention and professional updating, new products and services, knowledge exchange and transfer, and technological innovation through new research and educational provision. Higher education provides advice to business and the wider community and acts as a global gateway for attracting investment and mobile talent.
- Higher education benefits from a close interaction with Lebanese society and business. This close relationship ensures that educational and research programmes remain relevant to societal needs in addition to providing opportunities for on-going educational and training opportunities.

Achieving these objectives rests on the quality and relevance of the curriculum as well as forward-looking approaches to knowledge and skills acquisition through effective educational practices. This includes adoption of work-based and work-informed learning, innovative modes of delivery, learner and career pathways, shorter and different types of programmes and new forms of credentials. Greater flexibility in the organisation and delivery of education empowers students to tailor their entry, exit, assessment and qualifications to their personally determined needs with the introduction of competency-based education and micro-credentials. Lessons learned from the pandemic should be mainstreamed, moving some of the learning to digital platforms and on-line provision.

The link between qualifications and occupations is complex and multifaceted. Higher qualifications do not necessarily equate with better opportunities if people lack the right skills or there is a lack of confidence in the quality of the credential or the economy and labour

⁵⁰ Hazelkorn, E. (2019). Relationships Between Higher Education and the Labour Market – A Review of Trends, Policies and Good Practices. Paris: UNESCO.

market are sluggish or in crisis. The concept of a skills eco-system highlights that skills supply relates to a complex set of intertwined issues including skill demand and economic and innovation policies.

To help bridge this gap, representatives of universities and enterprise and civil society should work closely together. The former should be involved in identifying education priorities and new opportunities, shaping learning outcomes, influencing career guidance, providing internship programmes, advising on faculty appointments and promotion criteria, evaluating research projects and their impact, and similar types of activities. This requires structures and processes at sectoral levels as well as university level.

Continuous education and lifelong learning define another domain where collaborations may be further developed. The need for upskilling and reskilling in different sectors exists in the present periods of transition. As people live actively for longer, there will be a continuous need to provide opportunities for further learning or new career/life opportunities. The digital transformation offers an opportunity for reinforcing collaboration and establishing mutual trust that benefits to sustain the collaborations.

The quality of higher education is related to the quality of the academic profession. Ensuring faculty have a strong academic, professional and/or practical experience is vital. There is an on-going need to develop new policies and practices for teaching and learning, including digitalisation and strategies for continuous innovation, as well as on-going professional training (e.g., pedagogical methodologies, immersive learning experiences, curriculum development, use of technology and digitalisation, teaching non-traditional students, practice-based/community-engaged learning and research, assessment of work-based learning settings, etc.). Adopting a student engagement approach, which involves students directly in their own learning, is essential to improve learning outcomes.

Finally, the quality of higher education contributes to educational relevance, life relevance and personal relevance – all of which are important. There is a direct link between achieving the quality of teaching, the learning experience and graduate outcomes (educational relevance), the way in which graduates can use their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts and help solve real-world issues and problems (life relevance), and how education contributes to and affirms personal ambition (personal relevance). The purpose of a comprehensive quality assurance system is to determine if institutions are functioning effectively and efficiently, helping students persist through to completion in a timely fashion, and that educational studies are commensurate with the benefits realised.

8.2 Overview of Education and Training Provision in Lebanon

As already noted, the Lebanese higher education system comprises:

- 1 public university; the Lebanese University;
- 50 private institutions⁵¹ divided as follows: 36 universities, 9 university colleges and faculties, 3 theology colleges and 2 institutions that have acquired a license and did not start their activities.

⁵¹ According to: www.higher-edu.gov.lb/arabic/privuniv/personal_univ.html

More than 80% of students are enrolled in fewer than 10 universities with Lebanon University enrolling approximately 40% of all students. Between 2015-2020, the number of students has risen but the distribution across degree levels has remained relatively constant. There is also large variation in the average number of professors (of any type) per programme, ranging from none to fifteen. Demographic data indicate no significant decrease in the total number of students enrolling in general education thereby suggesting the demand for higher education will continue.

More than 2100 degrees are offered by all Lebanese universities, among which more than 1000 are at bachelor level, more than 800 at master's level and more than 200 at PhD level. Students, and their parents, show a preference for courses in the medical/health professions, law and engineering. The large number of programmes per total number of students enrolled suggests an average of 100 students per programme. In addition, the non-uniform distribution of students across different universities and the multiple campuses per institution suggests some programmes and corresponding classes have a very limited number of students. This fragmentation does not serve efficiency and optimal usage of limited available resources – physical, human, financial and capital. Full details are available in the Background Paper.

The universities have responded well to the pandemic, moving to on-line and hybrid teaching. Students have been willing to use digital tools. However, the combination of the financial, economic, fuel and internet crises and the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated inequalities in accessing education, including higher education. Faced with rising fees and financial costs associated with university attendance, the crisis has prompted an exodus from the private to public sector with implications for both Lebanese University and the private universities.

The crisis has led to an accelerating brain drain amongst academic and research staff as well as students with a negative impact on academic programmes and more particularly on specialised courses. Students are choosing to study abroad or emigrate upon graduation to other countries in the region or elsewhere (depending upon linguistic competences).

Many of these issues precede the current crisis. For example, there is no official information on student progression or graduate employment although evidence points to low retention rates across the HE system. Graduate employment/unemployment is also not a new phenomenon. Rather it reflects deep structural weaknesses in the economy and a gap between demand and supply resulting in skills mismatch. Youth unemployment has been rising over the past decade. Most worryingly, employment rates are highest amongst higher education graduates compared with students with only basic or intermediate education. Females out-number males in the overall higher education system although female youth unemployment rate is 1.3 times that of males. There are also limited female employers or self-employed. Given these difficulties, many universities orient their education programmes for their students/graduates accordingly towards emigration.

In summary,

Lebanese higher education faces four inter-related challenges:

- 1) Quality and relevance of the education programmes, and hence graduate employability/unemployment,
- 2) Insufficient flexibility and diversity in the programme offerings across the system,
- 3) Weak linkages between universities and business/industry and civil society, and
- 4) Limited innovation in modes of teaching and learning.

The current crisis, alongside rapid expansion of the Lebanese higher education system since the 1990s, has created a large and fragmented system leading to inefficient and ineffective use of limited resources, uneven quality and inadequate institutional mission and programme diversity.

The relationship between universities and business/industry is not well developed, with weaknesses on both sides. Education programming is principally supply-driven due to poor understanding of skills needs and little formal engagement between government, the universities, and the private sector.⁵² There are two inter-related challenges for universities: (i) having a better understanding of current labour market conditions, and (ii) having a deeper knowledge of future labour market trends and opportunities. The business sector is unable to fully absorb/employ all the graduates at the appropriate level, and as a result has limited access to the full breadth of talent required for the domestic economy.

An assessment of strategic opportunities for Lebanon points to the importance of developing high value-added future-proofed productive sectors by focusing on issues of economic competitiveness and a knowledge-based, high-value economy with established areas of excellence. Lebanon's higher education sector can play a significant role in "reigniting the productive economy" and helping to "overhaul the business environment". The following priority sectors have been identified: agriculture, industry with a focus on high-human-value artistic products, tourism, the knowledge economy, and financial services beyond banking.⁵³ The present crisis provides an opportunity and incentive for a more constructed collaboration. Finally, educational provision, in general, is too similar across the system. There is insufficient diversity in disciplines, contents, and levels of study. The curriculum is designed in a way which offers limited practical experience, and thus is unresponsive to the changing dynamics of the labour market. There is a high demand for programmes in areas such as medicine, law and engineering while areas requiring higher technical education and skills are underserved by the system. At the same time, HE graduates are seen as overqualified for/by the local market. As a result, there are high levels of emigration of skilled graduates because the labour market cannot employ them in their fields of qualifications. As a consequence, graduate employment opportunities are seen as lying in regional and international labour markets

⁵² Consultation & Research Institute. (2019). *Summary of Lebanon Economic Vision*. https://www.fes-lebanon.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Mckinsey_Plan/Summary__of_the_Economic_Vision.pdf

⁵³ Consultation & Research Institute. (2019). *Summary of Lebanon Economic Vision*. https://www.fes-lebanon.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Mckinsey_Plan/Summary__of_the_Economic_Vision.pdf

rather than domestically – with implications for the type of programmes offered and for student/family ambitions.

8.3 Programme Actions

Table 9. Overview of Priority Area 5 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: IMPROVING RELEVANCE AND QUALITY OUTCOMES.
PRIORITY AREA 5: Education, Skills and Relevance. Put in place structures and processes to ensure that the higher education system, individual HEIs and education programmes contribute significantly to the skills needs of the Lebanese economy.
Programme 5.1. Establish a National Taskforce to review all programmes based on an exhaustive study of current degrees.
Programme 5.2. Establish a Universities-Economic stakeholders Forum.
Programme 5.3. Establish a national system for academic and vocational guidance.
Programme 5.4. Establish a University/Institutional Research Unit.

The quality and relevance of education programmes and, relatedly, the employability of graduates pose a serious challenge for Lebanon, a problem which predates the current situation. The improvement of higher education outcomes, especially regarding graduate employability and other opportunities, is related both to the quality and relevance of the educational programmes as well as to curriculum and pedagogical approaches. The link between qualifications and occupations can be complex and multifaceted but the curriculum provides the best catalyst for innovation and opportunity to embed employability skills into teaching, learning and assessment experiences for students. It also presents an opportunity for educators, employers and policymakers to join forces to create new pathways to develop skills and competences relevant to the needs of Lebanon now and into the future.

Programme 5.1. Establish a National Taskforce to Review all Programmes based on an exhaustive study of current degrees.

The objective is to establish a time-limited National Taskforce under the remit of the Policy Implementation Committee (PIC) under Strategic Objective 1 to undertake a baseline review of the current portfolio of all educational programmes offered in Lebanon specially at undergraduate and master’s level. By studying the full range of programmes offered, it will be possible to identify the breadth of diversity of opportunities as well as unnecessary duplication. It will also provide ways to improve the diversity, as well as identify opportunities for collaboration and complementarity within the global offer. The national taskforce should propose a short plan for enriching the offer in a way to allow serving the local needs better. The work of this taskforce will complement the work being undertaken by the External Quality Review Lebanese Higher Education (Programmes 2.7).

Programme 5.2. Establish a Universities-Economic stakeholders Forum.

The objective is to establish a Universities-Economic Forum on a statutory basis to provide an opportunity for universities and employers to work together to meet the emerging skills needs. Structured engagement will contribute to better mutual understanding of the labour market and educational provision, to identify ways in which the higher education and business communities can work together, and to use existing information to improve outcomes for learners and provide support for enterprise development.

The Council should bring together education leaders and employers on an at least twice-yearly basis to promote greater understanding and cooperation, to develop new initiatives and actions, and to provide strategic advice to government and universities in order to strengthen the quality and relevance of higher education. The Forum is dedicated to dialogue on skills needed by the market, and research-based solutions needed by enterprises and companies. The Forum will play an important role in promoting understanding of the benefits of the new quality assurance system and of the Lebanese Qualifications Framework.

The Terms of Reference of the Forum should be developed by the DGHE and PIC, in consultation with the HEIs, business community and civil society.

Liaison with other ministries would be important in order to ensure policy coherence. The Council should operate under the remit of the Director General of Education and Higher Education (DGHE).⁵⁴

Programme 5.3. Establish a national system for academic and vocational guidance.

The Observatory will be established as part of the Universities-Economic Forum. Its main responsibility is to advise Government, employers and the education and training system on projected skills requirements at national and sectoral levels and make recommendations on how best to address identified needs. In particular, it should make recommendations as to how the education and training systems and delivery mechanisms might be adapted to better effect and the role that enterprise can play in the shaping of the skills of their workforce.

Terms of Reference will include:

- Collect data and undertake research and produce reports which combine research, analysis and horizon-scanning in relation to emerging skills requirements at thematic and sectorial levels;
- Advise on projected skills requirements at national and sectoral levels and make recommendations on how best to address identified needs;
- Make recommendations on how existing education and training systems and delivery mechanisms might be adapted to better effect;
- Make recommendations on the role enterprise can play in the shaping up of the skills of their workforce;
- Advise on any skills requirements that cannot be met within Lebanon and must be met through migration.

⁵⁴ The Regional Skills Council is an example of a similar type organisation operating in Ireland at the sub-national level. <https://www.regionalskills.ie>

To fulfil these objectives, the Observatory will operate in close liaison with relevant university departments/research institutes.

Each university will establish Programme Advisory Committees (PACs), generally at the School level, in order to ensure better outcomes for learners, including employability. The PAC will provide an effective mechanism for gathering and acting upon advice and inputs from business, industry and the professions. The aim is to establish structured and purposeful engagement with key stakeholders in order to inform the design, delivery and assessment of education programmes, and research.

The PAC also forms an essential and structured part of a comprehensive Internal Quality Assurance system.

The role of the PAC is closely aligned with the objective of Priorities 2 and 9. The objective is to help universities improve quality and relevance, and meet societal expectations and needs and demonstrate their value to society.⁵⁵

The PAC should comprise approximately 10 people, including academics, representatives from business relevant to the disciplines, and graduates.

Programme 5.4. Establish a University/Institutional Research Unit.

Universities will be required to establish an Institutional Research Unit, with the capacity and capability to collect and analyse labour market information and future skills needs. It should facilitate strategic decision-making and promote this information throughout the university. It should also be responsible for operationalising the employer and graduate surveys (see Programme 4.3). Information and insights gained through graduate and employer surveys can provide essential information about the quality and relevance of the curriculum and programme, quality assurance of the outputs, discipline-specific information, and other important issues.

Alternatively, these responsibilities could be assigned to the internal quality assurance offices or labour market study centres that are already established at universities.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Martin, M., & Uvalić-Trumbić, S. (2021). *A New Generation of External Quality Assurance. Dynamics of change and innovative approaches*. p. 70-71.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377497/PDF/377497eng.pdf.multi>

⁵⁶ Here is an example from Austria: <https://www.ceu.edu/unit/institutional-research-office>

Chapter 9.

Priority Area 6: University-based Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI)

Develop a Strong University-based Research, Development and Innovation System at the National and Institutional Level.

9.1 Importance of University-based Research for Knowledge and Society

Undertaking research is a core mission of higher education. Students should be able to use knowledge to develop themselves as well as to contribute to their field of study and the society in which they live. Because universities are fundamental to the success, sustainability and competitiveness of knowledge societies, research is part of the wider process of innovation (both social and technological). Research, development and innovation (RDI) highlights the interconnections between new knowledge discovery, the development of existing and new products and services, and the transformation and development of new ways of doing things through invention and (social and technological) innovation.

Higher education's significance relies upon two key "connectors" which form a reinforcing *eco-system* upon which society depends human capital and knowledge production and innovation.

- Human capital: Higher education produces graduates with modern skills, who are capable of independent, autonomous operation. This raises the overall productive capacity because smart, creative individuals, with knowledge and competences, have a much higher impact on society and the economy than non-graduates.
- Knowledge production and innovation: Higher education produces a cohort of skilled knowledge workers who can lead and catalyse the long-term provision of knowledge and ideas through research and discovery, carry out further research and are technologically knowledgeable employer/employees as well as being innovators and entrepreneurs/" intrapreneurs".

Being involved in global science ensures countries are at the cutting edge of new discoveries and (social and technological) innovations that contribute not only to their own future but to the planet. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG) provides an important research framework for universities and countries. To address complex societal challenges, that transcend peoples and borders, solutions require combining the knowledge of different disciplines with that of public and private sector stakeholders and citizens.

International collaboration was key to identifying the human genome (1990-2003), and vaccines and other treatments for Covid-19, and will be equally important for finding longer-term solutions for sustainability. Open Science is a critical enabler for international

collaboration, providing open access to research publications and sharing research data and methods as well as open educational resources (OER).

Higher education is uniquely placed to lead the cross-sectoral implementation of the SDGs and advance the 2030 agenda by strengthening and institutionalising collaborative partnerships between HEIs, and between higher education and social, economic and government partners. There is a direct link between a strong research ecosystem in a country and doctoral education.

The quality of doctoral education is vital to the development of human and knowledge capital and an indicator of the quality of the knowledge and talent pipeline within a country. Accordingly, there are considerable efforts across the European Union, and elsewhere, to introduce a common framework for doctoral studies to ensure all doctoral students, regardless of which university or university faculty, are provided with the same high-quality research training, experience and outcomes.⁵⁷ The objective is to imbue doctoral graduates and early career researchers (ECR) with the necessary transferable/soft skills necessary to advance their careers across a broad range of employment sectors. Research integrity and ethical training are also vital.⁵⁸

Innovations in teaching and learning and contributions to society also apply to research skills – to undergraduate students undertaking research as part of their degree and to post-graduate students. Many universities provide research opportunities for students to work on projects alongside their professor either during term-time or during vacations. This may include working on real-life projects, helping firms to solve technological or service provision problems, or to understand customer responses to products or other issues. Responsible research and innovation, a term used by the European Union and underpinning Horizon 2020, assesses the potential implications and societal expectations with regard to RDI, and asks researchers to be inclusive and sustainable throughout the entire research process and its outcomes.⁵⁹

9.2 Observations on the Lebanese University-based Research System

Developing research is a priority for Lebanese higher education but the majority of HEIs in Lebanon are primarily teaching institutions. Measured by the number of publications, research activity is concentrated in a small number of universities. Five universities produce 90% of the total publications and one university produces more than 40% of total publications.

Law 285/2014 does not regulate the research structure and activities. However, Article 3 specifies that the objective of higher education is to “cater for the needs of society by buildings its capacities and improving its possibilities and through scientific research”. It also refers to the role of higher education in “sustaining scientific research through the

⁵⁷ <https://eua-cde.org>

⁵⁸ <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/salzburg%20ii%20recommendations%202010.pdf>

⁵⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/responsible-research-innovation>

creation of research centres and laboratories” and mentions the importance of promoting cooperation and expertise exchange among Higher Education and scientific research institutions, both private and public, in Lebanon and abroad, and with productive establishments.

Institutions which are designated as “universities” should hire PhD holders (no less than 60% of the full-time faculty members) and should devote a minimum 5% of their budgets to support research activities. Research developmental plans are necessary for new masters and doctoral programmes (Articles 50 and 51).

Developing research activities is the responsibility of the National Council for Scientific Research⁶⁰ (NCSR/CNRS). The NCSR reports to the Prime Minister while universities report to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. NCSR has established several support programmes (PhD grants, Projects’ grants, Centre of Excellence Grants, etc.). Unfortunately, its budget is shrinking every year. Researchers are turning to international agencies and programmes to secure funds for their projects (CEDRE, AUF, DAAD, H2020, etc.).

The decree on doctoral studies (Decree 10068/2013) indirectly supports the development of research. However, this presupposes that universities have the academic faculty-researchers and facilities necessary to provide the appropriate level of doctoral training. International collaboration brings significant benefit to the universities and doctoral candidates and helps to reduce the divide in knowledge/expertise between Lebanon and the developed countries.

In summary, there is small, burgeoning research activity in Lebanon. However, there is no national strategy or plan for developing or supporting university-based research, and institutions vary considerably in their capacity and capability, and the quality of their outputs and outcomes. Doctoral education has been growing with more than 200 doctoral “programmes” for 2,960 students (2019-2020) – which seems disproportionate given the size of research activity and the research community. There is weak alignment between doctoral education and national social and economic needs – reflecting a similar imbalance between supply and demand found elsewhere in the education system.

Global rankings have many faults, but they can provide some guidance regarding the status of Lebanese higher education internationally. For 2019 and 2020, five Lebanese universities are dominant although their rank varies across the different rankings. Given the situation in Lebanon this is a good achievement but there are considerable difficulties in trying to use global rankings as an instrument of policy or institutional ambition. The costs of chasing rankings are financially unattainable for Lebanon and trying to do so will severely undermine the role that Lebanese universities should be playing in their country. In addition, their methodologies are too reliant on publications, and they fail to value the full breadth of research activity or its public value and impact that research creates. Much better to develop a good quality assurance system as discussed in Strategic Objective 2. (See also discussion on internationalisation and benchmarking - Priority Area 10).

⁶⁰ <http://cnrs.edu.lb>

9.3 Programme Actions

Table 10. Overview of Priority Area 6 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: IMPROVING RELEVANCE AND QUALITY OUTCOMES.
PRIORITY AREA 6: University-based Research, Development and Innovation (RDI). Develop a strong university-based research, development and innovation system at the national and institutional level.
Programme 6.1. Develop a National University-based Research Policy and Strategy supporting innovation and development.
Programme 6.2. Establish National Centres of Excellence.

Programme 6.1. Develop a National University-based Research Policy and Strategy supporting innovation and development.

It is acknowledged that research conducted in HEIs is only part of a wider Lebanese research system. However, a National University-based Research Policy and Strategy in Lebanon is an essential building block to developing a high-quality university-based research system in Lebanon and contributing to the wider research ecosystem. Without a national policy framework, it will be extremely challenging to develop a sufficient high-quality university-based research system that can be innovated and exploited for the benefit of Lebanon. Without reform, university-based research will continue to be imbalanced between individual curiosity and university interests and societal need, and quality will continue to suffer.

The research system should be well aligned with the social, cultural and economic needs of Lebanon. It should be well integrated with the teaching and learning missions of universities to ensure students at all levels experience their discipline at its most developed stage – whilst recognising that universities should have different RDI missions and not all universities should aspire to, or be required to, develop university-based research activity or to be research intensive.

Given the direct connection between RDI and economic development, national policy should identify and support niche/priority fields or societal challenges. These areas should focus on developing innovative products and services which can boost competitiveness as well as providing expertise and knowledge to underpin evidence-based decision-making and support social and cultural life. The review should address the structures, support systems and funding required to encourage and sustain a vibrant and innovative research culture across Lebanese universities and their interaction with the wider research ecosystem.

Guided by the Sustainable Development goals (SDGs), much greater emphasis should be placed on collaboration and engaged university-based research for societal impact. Societal challenge-oriented research is solution focused and as such presupposes there are implications for society. Hence, there is a responsibility on researchers to involve end-users from the very start of the research design process. There is also a greater need for cross-sectorial coordination.

Accordingly, there will be closer linkages between teaching and research and better coordination across the Lebanese university-based research system. The DG for Higher

Education (as per Strategic Objective 1) will have responsibility for both higher education and university-based research.

This should focus on a select number of key priority fields or societal challenges. It should place university-based research and innovation at the heart of the national policy in order to capitalise on university strengths and on key opportunities for Lebanon to help it recover.

Programme 6.2. Establish National Centres of Excellence.

Given the emergent and dispersed nature of university-based research activity across universities and the country, it is strongly recommended that national policy focuses on prioritising collaboration between higher education institutions in research and concentration on a few key priority areas. Collaborative and inter-sectoral approaches provide excellent opportunities to pool expertise and resources (physical, human, infrastructure, financial) and to open new fields of inquiry that can enhance quality as well as improve efficiencies. Industry and work-based doctorates represent a way to involve researchers and doctoral students in real-life projects while also providing a mechanism for funding and route for graduate employment.

The formation of university-regional innovation hubs, drawing on the particular characteristics of the different regions of Lebanon (e.g., Grand Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon, Bekaa, South Lebanon), should be considered. This follows the pattern developing across the European Union, and elsewhere, to favour the concept of smart specialisation – to strengthen links between universities and business/employers based on the strengths and needs of their community.

National Centres of Excellence (CoE) have the capacity and capability to maximise university-based research strengths, expertise and talent through collaboration. Investment should be targeted to select areas of critical mass and potential aligned with future societal and economic needs. These CoE would be shared/collaborative facilities which are linked with doctoral education, as discussed below. They would provide leadership, best practices, research support and/or training, etc.

In addition, Centres of Excellence, with an emphasis on priority niche areas can bring together active scholars from across Lebanon, the region and beyond. Working alongside doctoral students they can succeed in increasing the quality and reputation of Lebanon and hence strengthen its place within the global science system. International students are attracted to dynamic knowledge hubs with specialist expertise, innovative learning experiences and new opportunities.

Chapter 10.

Priority Area 7: Doctoral Education

Develop a National Framework for Doctoral Education.

Third-level studies form the basis for knowledge production, and this production is the foundation for development and modernization. In order to produce knowledge, several elements must be secured, the most important of which is the capable and specialized human cadre and material, financial and logistical capabilities. Given the small size of Lebanon and its relatively limited capabilities, especially at the level of the percentage of the national gross domestic product allocated to scientific research, and the budgets allocated by Lebanese higher education institutions for this research, it is necessary for these institutions to cooperate to develop a research framework for third-level programs, by supporting Selected joint research and the establishment of cooperative doctoral schools in scientific fields related to the specificity of Lebanon, its reality and the region, and in fields of importance, especially applied sciences and technology.

10.1 Programme Actions

Table 11. Overview of Priority Area 7 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: IMPROVING RELEVANCE AND QUALITY OUTCOMES.
PRIORITY AREA 7: Doctoral Education.
Develop a National Framework for Doctoral Education.
Programme 7.1. Develop a National Framework for Doctoral Education.
Programme 7.2. Develop a Research Cooperation Platform between the concerned Stakeholders, in particular between DGHE and LNCSR, and establish Collaborative Doctoral Schools.

Programme 7.1. Develop a National Framework for Doctoral Education.

A National Framework for Doctoral Education should be agreed and implemented. It should recognise that a core component of the doctorate is the advancement of knowledge while also recognising the need to prepare graduates for widening employment opportunities including in business and innovation. Ensuring high quality doctoral education carries important reputational implications for all universities and the country.

The key education objectives for all graduates of doctoral programmes should include: research skills and awareness; ethics and social understanding; communication skills; personal effectiveness/development; team-working and leadership; career management;

entrepreneurship and innovation. Based on the Salzburg Principles,⁶¹ the Framework would commit Lebanon to the highest standards in the provision of doctoral education and research through the endorsement of key principles, underpinned by a robust quality assurance system.⁶²

Of great importance, a National Framework requires adequate support structures be established and robust quality assurance system underpinning all doctoral provision, notably supervision by a principal supervisor(s), normally with a supporting panel approved by the institution; formal monitoring of progress to completion against published criteria, supported by institutional arrangements; clearly defined examination processes, involving external examiners, assessment criteria and declared outcomes. Sections should also concern regulations regarding for co-tutelle PhDs with foreign institutions, and the active engagement of international supervision and at least one international examiner during the final defence of the thesis.

Doctoral education comes within the responsibility of the MEHE. To oversee and monitor quality, the creation of and evaluation of doctoral programmes should come within the responsibility of the LQAA.

To include these various dimensions may require amendment of the decree on doctoral studies.

Programme 7.2. Develop a Research Cooperation Platform between the concerned Stakeholders, in particular between DGHE and LNCSR, and establish Collaborative Doctoral Schools.

The National Framework for Doctoral Education should promote and support the establishment of doctoral schools. Collaboration maximises expertise and widens new fields, increases specialisation and facilitates multi/inter-disciplinary research⁶³. Doctoral schools which meet the criteria could be formed by (i) individual universities, (ii) collaboration between 2 or more universities and/or (iii) nationally. Collaboration may also occur between universities and industry supporting industrial doctorates whereby students undertake their research in real-world settings.⁶⁴

⁶¹ <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/salzburg%20recommendations%202005.pdf>

⁶² It is recommended that Lebanon join the European University Association (EUA) Council for Doctoral Education (CDE). The CDE is the largest European network in doctoral education, covering more than 260 universities and institutions working on issues related to doctoral education and research training in 36 countries. <https://eua-cde.org>

⁶³ <https://hict.fi/about/>

⁶⁴ Borrell-Damian, L et al (2015) *Collaborative Doctoral Education in Europe: Research Partnerships and Employability for Researchers*. Brussels: European University Association. <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/collaborative%20doctoral%20education%20in%20europe%20report%20on%20doc-careers%20ii%20project%20.pdf>

Collaborative Doctoral Schools provide an excellent means for providing doctoral education to a wider group of students than might otherwise be sustainable by individual universities. It enables faculty and students to capitalise on the collective expertise of Lebanon's universities and maximising access to limited resources. This approach would help overcome uneven distribution of expertise, research resources (e.g., labs and equipment) and finances.

Chapter 11.

Priority Area 8: Teaching and Learning

Establish structures and processes for continual improvement of teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment.

Teaching and learning are in constant need of review and development, given the different needs and abilities of learners, and given the diversification of education patterns, forms and methods, and the link between the quality of outputs and the teaching methods used (traditional teaching, blended learning...). This diversification, which is imposed by the requirements of qualification, continuing education, and preparation during service, must coincide with a university pedagogy that affects curricula engineering, evaluation mechanisms, and teaching and learning methods.

11.1 Programme Actions

Table 12. Overview of Priority Area 8 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: IMPROVING RELEVANCE AND QUALITY OUTCOMES.
PRIORITY AREA 8: Teaching and Learning. Establish structures and processes for continual improvement of teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment.
Programme 8.1. Establish Centres for Improvement and Development in Teaching and Learning in HE institutions.

Programme 8.1. Establish Centres for Improvement and Development in Teaching and Learning in HE institutions.

The objective is to establish a national collaborative organisation drawing on the expertise and resources of all Lebanese universities and faculty to share good practice that supports continual improvement in teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment. It is vital to address employability at the curriculum level, as this offers the possibility to work on learning outcomes, graduate attributes and pedagogy in an integrated approach. The roles and goals of internships and work placements within the curriculum need to be considered in order to create a continuum between education and training, and how training can meet both employers' demands and the academic requirements in terms of content and duration.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ EUA (2021) Meeting skills and employability demands. Learning & Teaching Paper #13. https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/eua%20tpg%20report_meeting%20skills%20and%20employability%20demands.pdf

Particular focus should be on supporting those who learn, teach and lead in higher education to apply digital technology with the goal of enhancing learning, teaching and overall digital capability.⁶⁶ Efforts will be made to develop open education resources (OER) which can be freely accessed and distributed as well as massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other innovative approaches in order to increase participation and educational opportunities as well as to widen opportunities for collaboration.

The Centre should also provide education and training programmes for teachers in higher education who are interested in furthering their own professional development. These can include workshops to help transform and innovate programmes, with an emphasis on pedagogical training, work-based learning methodologies, innovative assessment approaches, digital teaching and learning, etc. Each module should be accredited and carry credits which can be aggregated to a qualification.⁶⁷ The optimum objective is to offer post-graduate qualifications in teaching and learning.

The key emphasis is on creating a collaborative organisation which brings faculty together from different universities in Lebanon, working together to maximise expertise and expand opportunities. Pooling resources is especially important in response to the fiscal challenges affecting universities and the country.

⁶⁶ Here is an example from Ireland: <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie>

⁶⁷ Here is an example from the University of Michigan, USA, <https://crlt.umich.edu>

Strategic Pillar 3:
Strengthening Social Responsibility and
Competitiveness

Chapter 12.

Priority Area 9: Service-to-Society and Civic Engagement

Make Service to Society and Civic Engagement a Requirement for all Higher Education Institutions in Lebanon
--

12.1 Role and Responsibilities of Higher Education

Over the centuries, universities have fulfilled a wide-range of roles – paramount amongst them has been their role in advancing knowledge and in nation building. Universities have served society well. As more people from more diverse backgrounds participate in higher education, questions are being asked about the purpose and focus of the university and university-based research.

Everywhere there are calls for universities to play a more active and intentional role in social, cultural and economic recovery and development. As people live actively for longer, universities are asked to adopt a lifelong learning approach and respond to on-going requirements for education and training as the norm. Attention is also drawn to students who are gradually being left behind by the current system and those unable to access education in any meaningful and sustained way. These developments have prompted and coincided with renewed thinking about the role universities play and their responsibilities with regard to strengthening social cohesion and economic sustainability, public discourse and democratic values.

Civic or community “engagement” is more than charitable actions or good deeds.⁶⁸ It involves holistic commitment and engagement between universities and society, putting knowledge in service to society through teaching and learning, scholarship and research, collaboration, outreach and engagement.

Universities have the capability, opportunity and responsibility to support the places where they are based to help solve some of the most pressing and major problems such as those identified in the UN SDGs. How universities have mobilised their knowledge and resources in response to COVID-19 and climate change are good examples. The long-term sustainability and the well-being of the communities they serve is tied to universities, resulting in them being referred to as “anchor institutions”. There is of course a mutuality in the relationship in that the communities also support and sustain the university community.

Engagement requires a “whole university” approach across several dimensions⁶⁹:

⁶⁸ Goddard, J., Hazelkorn, E., Kempton, L., & Vallance, P. (2016). *The Civic University: The Policy and Leadership Challenges*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781784717728>

⁶⁹ See also Farnell, T. (2020). *Community engagement in higher education: trends, practices and policies*. NESET report. https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NESET_AR1-2020_analytical-report.pdf

- **University-level engagement** – universities work in partnership with other education providers, industries/business and civil society to develop a shared vision for social, cultural and economic sustainability, and develop initiatives to address common challenges.
- **Teaching and learning** – provide life-long learning and continuing education programmes, student volunteer initiatives, as well as community-based learning (or ‘service learning’), a teaching methodology that combines classroom instruction, community service, student reflection and civic responsibility.
- **University-based research** – help local business (SMEs and large firms) to be innovative, develop new products and services and adapt to technological change. Engage in collaborative research which addresses a community-identified need, validates community knowledge, and contributes to social change.
- **Service and knowledge exchange** – provide consultancy, capacity-building and business and professional services, and technology transfer and innovation activities.
- **Student initiatives** – students directly address the needs of local communities by launching their own community engagement activities, either via student organisations or through activism and advocacy initiatives.
- **Widening participation and educational success** – support learners of all ages, ethnicity, race, gender, citizenship status and talents to access and participate successfully in higher education, especially as people live longer, and change jobs and careers more frequently.
- **Provide and open up services and resources** – open-up university facilities and provide public services through cultural centres, museums, theatres, galleries, sports facilities and cafes, etc.

Above all, higher education plays an essential role through its contributions to public discourse and policy, and in enhancing a public culture of tolerance, inclusion and democracy on and off campus and seeking to alleviate public problems through democratic means. To be successful, engagement requires a holistic approach, led by the president and senior leadership and involving the whole university, with a comprehensive and well-co-ordinated set of policies and actions. Because helping to ensure all learners are prepared for the changing dynamics of the workforce and the world in which we live, civic engagement and societal impact are indicators of a quality higher education system.

12.2 Engagement in Lebanon

Lebanon is a very diverse society, with a large refugee population. The high flow of migration in and out of the country is indicative of the complex and dynamic situation in the country and the region. The current financial, social and economic crisis has added to this complexity and the hardship of people across Lebanon.

School completion rates⁷⁰ are highly unequal among socio economic groups, with only half of 18-year-olds from the lowest economic quantiles completing secondary school.⁷¹ The percentage of Syrian students has been decreasing in the school system since 2017-2018 while the percentage of Lebanese students has been slowly increasing. For refugees, urgent social and economic support rather than higher education is a higher priority. This helps explain why almost 200,000 students or 90% of students enrolled in higher education are Lebanese and only 10% non-Lebanese. Accordingly, there is a strong social responsibility on Lebanese post-secondary institutions and universities to work with underrepresented and refugee communities to increase their rate of participation and successful completion in higher education.

There is growing awareness of the importance of building strong relations between universities and the socio-economic sector, and particularly the industrial sector, but connectivity and engagement by universities is weak for several reasons.

Universities tend to be traditional in their mission orientation and their approach to curriculum, pedagogy and teaching and learning. Education programmes are strongly theoretically focused with limited orientation to engaging students in real-life practices or case-studies or involving practice-based or work-based learning and/or in-company experiences.

University-society/business cooperation faces other challenges. Most Lebanese companies are SMEs and have little time to engage with universities which work according to different timelines and priorities. The university-based research community in Lebanon is small and is primarily investigator/curiosity driven. While societal impact is often a criterion for research funding, there is little inclination for in-country collaboration either between HE researchers or between HE researchers and industry despite funding support from NCSR. Finally, the high dependence of the Lebanese economy on incoming remittances makes it important to equip graduates with the skills and competences required in the global labour market. Thus, the orientation of many of the universities is outward rather than focused on developing strong links locally.

12.3 Programme Actions

The objective is to establish a set of actions at the national/governmental level and at the institutional level which can knit together to form a coherent and integrated approach to civic engagement. The aim is to require all accredited higher education institutions to play a full and active role in and with their society commensurate with their mission. Universities should be required to address the full range of responsibilities towards society, including business, local communities, the wider education sector and the wider international world. Universities should also provide intellectual and moral leadership, and promote equity, tolerance and democratic values.

How a university exercises its social responsibilities is closely correlated with the quality of the university.

⁷⁰ Abdul-Hamid and Yassine, 2020

⁷¹ CASE 2020 cited in WB 2021

Table 13. Overview of Priority Area 9 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS.
PRIORITY AREA 9: Service-to-Society and Civic Engagement. Make service-to-society and civic-engagement a requirement for all higher education institutions in Lebanon.
Programme 9.1. Develop a regulatory framework for involvement of higher education institutions in society services and civic engagement.

Programme 9.1. Develop a regulatory framework for involvement of higher education institutions in society services and civic engagement.

Each university will be required to develop a Framework for University Engagement which sets out its commitment to civic engagement and service to society as a core mission of the university.

- The Framework should be forward-looking with the aim of informing teaching and learning, research and innovation activities and delivering meaningful outcomes for the sustainability of Lebanon.
- The Framework should include developing on-going engagement with representatives key external stakeholders such as business and employer groups and civil society. This should reflect the objectives of Lebanese University-Industry.
- As part of the Framework, the University will include develop an Engagement Roadmap and Implementation Plan setting out the strategic objectives and actions to be achieved. It will also include a process for monitoring and assessing progress will be included.

Chapter 13.

Priority Area 10: Internationalisation and Strategic Partnerships

Strategically position Lebanon as a Regional and International Leader in Higher Education and University-based Research.

13.1 Internationalisation of Higher Education

Universities have been strongly international since the earliest universities were formed. They were places where scholars were encouraged to come and give lectures and share ideas; they were places of cosmopolitanism and a commitment to universal knowledge. In modern times social and economic changes, and the massification of higher education have prompted and facilitated rising levels of student, faculty and graduate mobility, and a growing international community of faculty and researchers engaging in education and research activities. International students, inter-culturalism and cultural exchanges, exchange programmes and curricular developments, etc., reflect this changing environment and the importance of university networking and networks. There are important spill-over benefits also for sustainable communities, innovation ecosystems, businesses, and civil society.

This expansion has succeeded in incorporating universities in the world of international higher education and global science, helping boost their attractiveness, reputation, and competitiveness. This growth also reflects the growing interconnectivity and integration between higher education systems and economic development as countries seek to support their expanding knowledge economies. This has led to a shift in internationalisation – from the primary focus being on cultural and academic co-operation to a broader and more competitive understanding that includes attracting and retaining talent, international student recruitment, and income generation.

Study abroad provides huge opportunities for intercultural competence and transversal skills development as well as bringing about greater understanding and appreciation of social and cultural difference. But the over-emphasis on mobility has created an inequality gap between the relatively small percentage of students who can take advantage of mobility opportunities and the vast majority of students – who because of financial or personal circumstances – are unable to do so.

Rankings have also become associated with internationalisation and institutional positioning, directly and indirectly. International students and faculty, as well as collaborative research and reputational surveys, are indicators commonly used by rankings. Universities use rankings as an indicator of status, and to attract students and investment and worry if they do not appear or “fall” in rank. However, rankings focus on a limited number of quantitative measures and say very little about the quality and accreditation status of a university – both of which are far more meaningful internationally.

Internationalisation is more than mobility. It includes all forms of transnational cooperation and inter-institutional partnerships, such as new models of joint programmes and joint degrees, on-line collaborative teaching and learning, collaborative research projects inspired by the SDGs, plus other forms of post-graduate and post-doctoral opportunities and internationalisation at home initiatives.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a disruptive impact on internationalisation, but some trends were already evident before the pandemic such as the:⁷²

- Growing importance of internationalisation at all levels involving a much broader range of activities, more strategic approaches, emerging national strategies and ambitions.
- Increasing number of universities developing their own institutional strategies for internationalisation.
- Importance of regionalisation and regional networks, with the EU often seen as an example.
- Increasing focus on internationalisation of the curriculum, transnational education and digital learning e.g., collaborative on-line learning (COIL).
- Importance of strategic partnerships involving the entire university rather than initiatives by individual departments.
- Peer-learning and benchmarking with international peers to provide deeper and more effective mutual learning opportunities and sharing good practices, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Integration of social responsibility, service-to-society, and engagement with internationalisation to strengthen global learning and global citizenship.

13.2 Internationalisation, Global Partnerships and Rankings in Lebanon

Lebanon is at the crossroads of the world where decisive factors have shaped history over the centuries. The country's role in the region, as indeed in the world at large, has been shaped by geography and trade; its stability is vital for the future. The country serves as a link between the Mediterranean world and India and East Asia. Lebanese society is an open, multicultural society, with its people possessing many intercultural and transversal skills. As such, languages do not form a barrier to the students. Most of the schools deliver their programmes in foreign languages. Moreover, many Lebanese professors have had a study period outside Lebanon and most of these scholars have maintained good ties with their host institutions. Accordingly, its educational system has attracted students from around the region and beyond. Internationalisation runs deep in Lebanese higher education.

Lebanon has been an active member of many EU programmes including Erasmus+ (and previously Tempus) and Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe. These programmes have encouraged the mobility of students, academics and researchers. In the period 2015-2020, 4,632 students and academics were offered mobility via Erasmus+ divided into: 2,972 from Lebanon to Europe and 1,660 in the opposite direction. In the period 2017-2019 eight joint masters projects were selected by the Erasmus Mundus Programme. International research

⁷² Wit, H. de, Hunter, F., Howard, L., & Egron-Polak, E. (2015). *Internationalisation of higher education*. <https://doi.org/10.2861/6854>

collaboration has also been developing. There are partnerships with many European countries in addition to those funded through NCSR and EU programmes. Many university websites dedicate a section to internationalisation and/or mobility.

The combination of the financial, economic, and political crisis and the pandemic have however raised alarm about the regional and global positioning of Lebanese universities. This has been particularly worrisome with respect to the resources for continuing engagement, and the recruitment of international students, especially with regard to international fee income which could help to bridge the funding gap. As a result, concerns have been expressed about the possible (negative) impact on the positioning of Lebanese universities in global rankings. While many Lebanese universities are accredited at the institutional and/or programme level by international quality assurance agencies, very few Lebanese universities are mentioned in the global rankings – and their rank varies according to ranking, albeit some occupy positions in regional rankings.

13.3 Programme Actions

Being part of international higher education and global science is vital for Lebanon, as it is for all countries. In the global knowledge society, how universities and their students and faculty perform reflects on a country’s geopolitical positioning, brings a sense of pride and acts as a beacon to attract and retain mobile investment and talent. And because higher education plays such a central role across society, affecting all areas of policy, and personal life, even people who do not attend university are affected by its outcomes.

Achieving these objectives requires a balanced approach. Ultimately, educational quality assured by a national quality assurance agency – which itself has been internationally quality assured – provides the best foundation for international competitiveness and sustainability.

Table 14. Overview of Priority Area 10 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS.
PRIORITY AREA 10: Internationalisation and Strategic Partnerships. Strategically position Lebanon as a regional and international leader in higher education and university-based research.
Programme 10.1. Develop a national framework and regulations for internationalisation and global partnership.
Programme 10.2. Each University to develop a university strategy for internationalisation and global partnership.
Programme 10.3. Embrace the opportunities of digital internationalisation.
Programme 10.4. Put in place appropriate policies based on highest standards to protect the rights of international students and to ensure that they have a good learning experience in high quality provision.

Programme 10.1. Develop a national framework and regulations for internationalisation and global partnership.

Lebanon will develop a *National Strategy for Internationalisation and Global Partnerships*. This will be a comprehensive approach that builds on Lebanon's role within the region, and seeks to strengthen the values of global citizenship, tolerance, democracy, integrity and sustainability. In developing its strategy, the Government should be cognisant of the following recommended definition of internationalisation as: "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society".⁷³

The focus will be on building long-term strategic partnerships with countries in the region, and beyond, using the SDGs as a framework for collaboration. While mobility and cultural exchange remains an important part of internationalisation, the strategy should be cognisant that it has only ever been an option for a very small percentage of the student body. It should also take lessons from the Covid-19 experience and develop digital approaches to internationalisation in line with Programme 10.3.

The strategy will be a whole of government strategy, aligning the different policies, strategies and activities of ministries that are relevant to and supportive of internationalisation in higher education. Of particular relevance is the network of Lebanese embassies as well as trade and other international relationships.

Programme 10.2. Each University to develop a university strategy for internationalisation and global partnership.

Each university should be required to develop its own university strategy for internationalisation and global partnerships aligned with the university's mission and societal responsibilities and the national strategy developed under Programme 10.1. A key focus should be on identifying appropriate peers and developing international strategic partnerships.

Universities should concentrate on developing holistic engagement across the entire university with another/other universities across the four university missions: education, research and innovation and service to society. There is a need to break down barriers between internationalisation of research and education. Thus, the aim is to widen education and research opportunities through genuinely collaborative projects, linked to the SDGs and university social responsibility (USR). In addition, there is a need for greater attention to be given to the importance of community-based opportunities and work placements in internationalisation of higher education, as well as for options to combine language and culture skills training, study abroad and work placements.

⁷³ Wit, H. de, Hunter, F., Howard, L., & Egron-Polak, E. (2015). Internationalisation of higher education. Prepared for the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education. p283 Brussels: European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2861/6854>

The focus should be on developed strategic and deep partnerships with a select number of appropriate peer institutions. These partnerships, rather than global rankings, should be used to strengthen international benchmarking and peer-learning.

Programme 10.3. Embrace the Opportunities of Digital Internationalisation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted traditional forms of international exchange, cooperation and mobility. However, it has also opened up many new opportunities especially in teaching and learning and for research (see also Programme 8.1).

Universities will embrace the opportunities of digital internationalisation to ensure that transnational cooperation and learning are deeply embedded and reach everyone within the university. Developing hybrid (traditional and digital) or wholly digital-based programmes will provide a greater opportunity to develop partnerships with universities in other countries and continents and to enhance and bring the international experience to as many students and staff as possible. Virtual mobility and exchange, collaborative online international learning (COIL)⁷⁴ and/or virtual work placements and team project work, internationalisation of the curriculum, internationalisation for society and global learning for all students provide the basis for continuous year-round international engagement. Digitalisation also provides a way to facilitate cross-border, multi-disciplinary research thereby creating opportunities to collaborate and strengthen expertise, and open up new fields.

In this way, internationalisation is a key to inclusivity, and links to the policy ambitions of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as discussed in Programme 11.1. SDG4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education including lifelong learning for all. This action will require investment, but this can be best accomplished if universities collaborate.

Programme 10.4. Put in place appropriate policies based on highest standards to protect the rights of international students and to ensure that they have a good learning experience in high quality provision.

Lebanon has a very internationalised higher education system with a very diverse student population reflecting its diversity. Lebanon's universities have been a hub for higher education and research in the region, welcoming many international students. In addition, there is a large refugee population. Internationalisation gives Lebanon the potential to develop global networks through fostering international talent. International students make a significant contribution to the Lebanese economy.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that international students are protected from exploitation, and that their educational experience is of the highest standards to ensure that they have a good learning experience in high quality provision.

There are direct implications for quality and quality assurance. Therefore, it is essential that all universities in Lebanon are rigorously accredited as per the quality assurances policies and procedures set out under Programme 2.2. Production of a Lebanese Register of Quality Assurance will play a critical role in ensuring the integrity of the Lebanese higher education system, and ensuring international students have a rewarding and enjoyable learning

⁷⁴ <http://onlineinternationallearning.org/about/>

experience when they come to Lebanon to study. Institutions which have not been accredited and are not listed on the Lebanese Register of Quality Assurance will not be permitted to recruit and/or enrol international students. This may have to be backed up by legislative provision.

Lebanon will introduce appropriate policies to protect the rights of all international students. This includes ratifying the Arab States Convention on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications, and joining ENIC-NARIC Network. This includes introducing policies that give due recognition to prior learning, competency-based learning and micro-credentials. These measures are all essential to ensure Lebanon remains an attractive destination for education and research.

Chapter 14.

Priority Area 11: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Ensure Equity of Access to and Participation in Higher Education, and that the Values of EDI are mainstreamed.

The Lebanese constitution approved the freedom of education and the principle of equal opportunities, justice and equality, and included in the context of the constitution a number of legislations and regulations that emphasized this. It is noticeable that there has been a significant development in the rates of enrolment, follow-up and success during the last quarter century, as the percentage of females has remarkably exceeded the percentage of males in higher education, and in various specializations. Despite this, higher education is currently facing many challenges as a result of the economic crisis that has afflicted Lebanon since the beginning of the year 2020, as the levels of living sufficiency of more than half of the Lebanese people have decreased to very dangerous limits, the presence of a large number of Syrian refugees and displaced persons exceeding one and a half million. Some of them joined the formal education system about ten years ago, and there is little left for their enrolment in higher education institutions. In another matter, higher education in general is still not ready to receive people with special needs and those with physical disabilities, or to provide appropriate programs for patients from certain categories.

14.1 Programme Actions

Table 15. Overview of Priority Area 11 Programmes.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS.
PRIORITY AREA 11: Equality, diversity and inclusion. Ensure equity of access to and participation in higher education, and that the values of EDI are mainstreamed.
Programme 11.1. Set a framework and regulations to ensure equality and justice in terms of parity in equity of access, participation, diversity and inclusion.

Programme 11.1. Set a framework and regulations to ensure equality and justice in terms of parity in equity of access, participation, diversity and inclusion.

Each university will be required to develop an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) statement of intent with clear objectives and targets. The aim is to achieve greater equality, diversity and inclusivity across all students and staff. An inclusive approach to student recruitment and provision of support services for students from across Lebanon will become the norm in order

to ensure all students have the opportunity to fully participate and succeed. Universities should consider setting ambitious targets.

Ambitious targets for gender equity of 40% of either gender will be introduced by each university. The objective is to overcome the under-representation of women in some education programmes and in positions in the universities and all staff, and across all disciplines, degree levels and career positions throughout the universities. This has important spill-over impacts on achieving gender equality throughout society and in working life.

Policies such as staff recruitment and academic promotion; staff development opportunities and post-doctoral training; and quality assurance procedures will be reviewed and updated to support best practice and to take full account of the University's responsibility and commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Lebanese government and universities have a joint responsibility to expand participation to under-represented and refugee communities by implementing recognition of prior learning and showing flexibility with regard to requirements for residency permits/civic documentation. See Programme 2.11 requires Ratification of the Arab States Convention on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention>

Appendix 1. International Quality Assurance Best Practice

Quality assurance is undertaken around the world. There is growing evidence of convergence of best practices based on common principles and practices. In other words, there are expectations that national and professional accrediting organisations are themselves operating at the highest international standards. This creates a cascade effect whereby external peer-review is undertaken of accreditation agencies, which in turn conduct external peer-review of institutions or programmes within their domain; the same institutions are required to put in place quality management systems which conduct on-going internal quality assurance of their activities.

The following associations provide important international benchmarks.

● ENQA and EQAR – The European System of Quality Assurance

ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, aims to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of European higher education, and to act as a major driving force for the development of quality assurance across all the Bologna Process signatory countries. ENQA is a membership organisation; membership is dependent upon a successful outcome of a review. ENQA undertakes external reviews of quality assurance agencies to assess their compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*. The external review is a prerequisite for being listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).⁷⁶

EQAR is the official government register of all QA agencies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It lists all QA agencies that work within an agreed common framework to ensure the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes. Currently, 50 agencies are registered by EQAR which means that they have demonstrated their substantial compliance with the ESG.

The ESG, the European Standards and Guidelines,⁷⁷ is the agreed common framework for quality assurance. Part 3, titled “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies”, identifies seven standards: activities, policies and practices; official status; independence from third-party influence; thematic analysis capacity and capability; resources; internal quality assurance and professional conduct; cyclical external review of agencies.

● INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

INQAAHE is a world-wide association of organisations active in the practice of quality assurance in higher education.⁷⁸ The greater majority of 300+ members are quality assurance agencies (as full members) that operate in many different ways.

⁷⁶ <https://www.eqar.eu>

⁷⁷ https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

⁷⁸ <https://www.inqahe.org>

INQAAHE has developed *Guidelines of Good Practice* (GGP) which should be embedded in all External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAA).⁷⁹ There are six aspects: structure; accountability; framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions; relationship to the public; decision making; and quality assurance of cross border higher education.

It also undertakes formal reviews of QA and accreditation agencies. The value of being accredited by INQAAHE is that it serves to assure government, the public, the institutions, students and internationally that the body which is responsible for monitoring quality assurance in/for the country is itself a quality-assured agency.

⁷⁹ <https://www.inqahe.org/guidelines-good-practice-ggp>

Appendix 2. Basic Principles of a Quality Assurance Framework for Lebanon

The basic principles of a Quality Assurance Framework should include the following aspects:

- The Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (LQAA) should be legally independent from external, including governmental, influence. This is considered paramount
- There should be three inter-connected processes:
 - External quality assurance review of the LQAA,
 - External quality assurance review of institutions,
 - Internal quality assurance review by the institutions of their programmes and services.
- The development of the evaluation process, criteria and methodology and the validation of its implementation should be the responsibility of the LQAA:
 - Policies and processes should take account of international best practice,
 - Policies and processes should acknowledge and respond to the diversity of higher education institutions, students and learners, and types of programmes (e.g., full-time, and part-time studies, micro-credentials and short courses) as well as recognition of different modes of study (e.g., in-class, hybrid and on-line learning) and recognition of prior learning and competency-based learning,
 - The objective of the review process is to make a judgment about quality. The focus is on formative and not summative evaluation with an emphasis on enhancement and improvement.
- The review process should:
 - Carry out analysis on the institution and/or the academic programme;
 - Involve a combination of self-study (peer review) and external review;
 - Involve peers carrying out reviews and making judgments about accreditation and quality assurance, and the management of these policies and processes;
 - Include international experts, students and external stakeholders (e.g., business/employer or civic society representatives);
 - Combine analysis of documents and site visits, and dialogue with people within the evaluated entity;
 - Be conducted in a transparent manner with the results made public and publicly accessible.
- The focus of the review should include, *inter alia*:⁸⁰
 - Enhancing education, including teaching, learning and assessment across all modes of delivery (e.g., open and distance learning, collaborative, transnational and e-learning) and all aspects of the student learning environment;
 - Assuring teaching is informed by scholarship and research, as appropriate for the level.
 - Leadership and management of the institution capable of assuring and managing the provision of quality programmes and research and other activities and safeguarding standards;

⁸⁰ Martin, Michaela, and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić. 2021. *A New Generation of External Quality Assurance. Dynamics of Change and Innovative Approaches*. Paris: UNESCO IIEP. See Chapter 3. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377497/PDF/377497eng.pdf.multi>

- Management of university-based research;
 - Internationalisation;
 - Management of student and support services (e.g., libraries, ICT, etc.);
 - Student learning outcomes and employability, including graduate tracking;
 - Civic Engagement and Service to Society, including programme relevance;
 - Academic Integrity, Human Rights and EDI.
- There should be an emphasis on the use of codified, documented and publicly available information about the quality assurance policies and procedures, and the results of all reviews should be made public.
 - There should be a strong commitment to both external quality assurance of the agencies and institutions, and international quality assurance by institutions of their activities.
 - External reviews of institutions should be conducted periodically, every 3-5 years; external review of the QA agency should be conducted similarly.
 - Due recognition should be given to the importance of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and some degree of self-regulation.
 - All policies should be standards-based.
 - The solicitation of feedback (e.g. survey) from students and other constituents, such as business and employers, should form an important part of the self-evaluation report, and a regular part of internal quality assurance processes.
 - All institutions and programmes should be accredited/quality assured, according to recognisable standards and status, in order to operate, to receive funding, to accept credit transfer, and for mutual recognition of qualifications in the country and internationally.

Appendix 3. Consultations

CONSULTED PERSON(S)	INSTITUTION/POSITION	DATE
DG Fadi Yarak	Director General of Higher Education	18 October 2021
Dr. Jean Noel Baleo	AUF "Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie" / Regional Director	20 October 2021
Dr. Fady Gemayel	Association of Lebanese Industrialists / President	27 October 2021
Dr. Aref Al Soufi Dr. Hana Al Ghali Dr. Nada Moghaizel Nasr Dr. Hania Nakkash Dr. Diane Nauffal Dr. Mohamad Oueidat	Erasmus+: National Erasmus+ Office, Higher Education Reform Experts	28 October 2021
Mrs. Agatha Abi Aad	UNHCR / National Education Officer	1 November 2021
DG Fadi Yarak	Director General of Higher Education	2 November 2021
Dr. Rima Sarkis Kazan	Order of Nurses / Chairperson Faculty of Nursing (USJ) / Dean	3 November 2021
M.D. Doreid Oueidat replacing M.D. Charaf Abou Charaf	Order of Physicians / Chairperson	3 November 2021
Père Salim Daccache	Université Saint Joseph / Rector Association of Lebanese Universities / Chairperson	3 November 2021
Mrs. Zeina Salame Mr. Ahmad Al Amine	USAID / Deputy Director Office Education USAID / Responsible HE	5 November 2021
DG Mohamad Abou Haidar	Director General Economy	9 November 2021
Dr. Bassam Badran Dr. Véronique Kaspar	Lebanese University / President Lebanese University / Director International Relations	11 November 2021
Dr. Rita El Meouchy Dr. Sobhi Abou Chahine	Academic Technical Committee / Members	11 November 2021

Dr. Abbas Fardoun		
Mr. Jukka Haapamaki	Ministry of Education and Culture Finland	15 November 2021
Dr. Hassan Shraim Dr. Divina Abou Jaoude Dr. Maysam Farhat Mr. Joseph Mcheileh	Engineering Committee / Members	17 November 2021
Dr. Elise Njeim	NCSR / Head of Programme	18 November 2021
Mr. Rida Diab Ms. Cybele Ghanem Ms. Joewey El Ghoul Mr. Jean-Paul Haddad Ms. Fatima Naji	Lebanese University / Students	18 November 2021