



Issam Fares Institute for Public
Policy and International Affairs

معهد عصام فارس للسياسات
العامة والشؤون الدولية

Public Policy Lecture on the Higher Education Reform Project

November 26, 2013

Summary by Brett Schmicking

Panelists

- Dr. Ahmad Jammal, Director General of Higher Education, Ministry of Education & Higher Education
- Dr. Chafic Mokbel, Secretary General of Research Council, University of Balamand & Lebanese Higher Education Reform Expert, National Tempus Office
- Dr. Georges Yahchouchi, Director of Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office, The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)

Moderator

- Dr. Hana El-Ghali, Senior Program Coordinator, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs

Summary

On November 26, 2013, The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI), through the Research, Advocacy and Public Policy-making Program (RAPP), held a panel entitled “Public Policy Lecture on the Higher Education Reform Project” as part of its Public Policy-Making in the Arab World Series. The panel featured Dr. Ahmad Jammal, Dr. Chafic Mokbel, and Dr. Georges Yahchouchi. The three panelists presented the perspectives of different stakeholders within the policy-making process of establishing the National Quality Assurance Agency.

Dr. Jammal examined the government’s role in developing a Lebanese Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency by presenting a historical overview of the development of the higher education sector in Lebanon and highlighting past and current efforts to regulate

and govern these institutions. He highlighted the central role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in economic development and the role these institutions can play in a more productive and innovative economy. Dr. Jammal also argued that the rapid increase in the number of HEIs coupled with the absence of a strategic plan for the sector and a well-enforced regulatory framework have had a negative impact on the general quality of higher education in the country. Adopting a strong strategic framework, which includes the drafting of a national charter for HEIs, updating legislation, and strengthening the capacity of the Lebanese University, can address issues of accountability, transparency, and governance if political, administrative, and financial constraints can be overcome. He also highlighted the role of the Directorate General for Higher Education in drafting and advocating for a number of policies to regulate the higher education sector in the country. Among these new regulatory policies is the law for the establishment of the National Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The Directorate played a direct role in ensuring that the policy reached the Parliament with minimal modifications as to ensure the independent and transparent role of this agency.

Dr. Chafic Mokbel presented the role of an international entity that played a significant role in preparing as well as supporting the policy. Dr. Mokbel's talk, entitled "On the Design of an Evaluation Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Experience of the Tempus-TLQAA¹ Project," presented the role of non-governmental stakeholders in the policy-making process and their coordination with governmental bodies in drafting new legislation. He further elaborated how the development of a national Quality Assurance (QA) system would help ensure the quality of HEIs in order to further develop a knowledge-based economy in Lebanon and maintain competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world. In the policy-making process, Dr. Mokbel highlighted several key issues, including how to maintain diversity in Lebanese HEIs; how to integrate more established institutions into a national QA system; and how to maintain a level of institutional independence, for both the HEIs and the QA agency. Dr. Mokbel argued that it was a challenge to frame the goal of national QA system highlighted in the policy as one that helps create a proper academic community in Lebanon rather than one that acts as an evaluation agency. He also outlined the next steps, which included: voting for the law at the general

¹ Toward the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency. www.tlqaa.org

assembly of the Parliament, reaching consensus about the independence of the agency, gaining legitimacy for the agency, which includes negotiating the process but under no circumstances the evaluation results with HEIs.

Dr. Georges Yahchouchi presented the perspective of a private university in the country, which has proceeded with institutionalizing quality assurance measures rather than wait for the National Agency. He discussed the reasons for investing in quality from the national as well as the university perspective: fighting unemployment and “brain drain”, sustaining competitiveness in the marketplace, and maximizing the return on investment for students and their parents. While Dr. Yahchouchi emphasized the importance of focusing on quality particularly through accreditation, he affirmed that quality alone is not enough; in other words, accreditation is the means to an end, and not an end by itself. The goal is to build high-performance universities. That process entails fostering proper attitudes towards embracing quality initiatives, entrepreneurship, continuous involvement of professionals and stakeholders, promoting active learning for innovation as well as a need for diversification of funding.

To conclude, this panel has shed light on the Higher Education Reform initiative from different perspectives, governmental, international and institutional. The Directorate General for Higher Education has played an active and direct role in ensuring that the law for the establishment of the National Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education policy reached the general assembly with minimal modifications as to ensure the independent and transparent role of this agency. The experience of the “Tempus-TLQAA Project” presented the role of non-governmental stakeholders in the policy-making process and their coordination with governmental bodies in drafting new legislation. Finally, the perspective presented by the private universities reflects how existing initiatives within private HEIs may facilitate the implications of the new policy and the work of the Lebanese Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency.