

Conference Paper

1st International Conference for Iraqi Experts in the Diaspora

Expedited Revival for Iraqi Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This paper proposes establishing a rotational visiting scholar system to enhance and enrich higher education in Iraqi Universities and Colleges by bringing in professors and experts from abroad to assist in teaching, research and administration in Iraqi educational institutions.

The visiting scientists and professors from abroad will teach undergraduate and graduate courses in universities and colleges that are in need of staff or that have lost their indigenous staff for various reasons. In addition, the visiting scholars will train graduate students and junior faculty in their area of specialization and identify and establish research collaborations between the two sides.

The proposed system would benefit Iraqi institutions by bringing in fresh expertise to energize and motivate students and faculty alike and bring new educational delivery methods. In addition, this temporary or trial period would allow the expatriate expert to evaluate the circumstances in the Iraqi institutions as well as their own circumstances and determine their needs should they decide to return to serve Iraq.

Introduction

The “brain drain” is a serious problem confronting not only Iraq but also the Arab and Muslim worlds at large. Thousands of experts of Arab and Muslim origin reside in Western countries and are achieving brilliant success there. While this is good for the experts’ own career development and for their host institutions, it is a big loss for their countries of origin. This problem has been brought up to discussions at various international forums over recent years. The problem of the brain drain in Iraq is further aggravated by the events of the past few years which led to a new phase of even more intense brain drain and many experts have left Iraq and continue to leave mainly due to violence and the lack of security and safety. Moreover, some Iraqi academics and experts continue to seek opportunities of employment and/or immigration abroad for economic reasons in addition to the security and safety issue alluded to earlier.

This scenario presents a grim picture for the future. In any society the educators and the experts are needed to sustain that society and to keep the sacred missions of educating the country’s youth and directing the scientific and industrial endeavors in the hands of its best. Therefore every effort must be made to create conditions that would entice not only the endogenous academics and experts to stay but also to facilitate the return from abroad of those who wish to do so. Facilitating the return of experts to Iraq is a good strategy for rescuing and developing science in Iraq. This conference is to be commended for its efforts to examine this issue.

There is no shortage of good-willed Iraqi scientists who genuinely want to return to work with their fellow Iraqis on rebuilding science in Iraq. And there is even a willingness among non Iraqi Arabs to come and help Iraq. Iraqis who left Iraq recently due to the security and safety issues alluded to earlier are perhaps the least likely to return given that they just realized their long sought goal of leaving and are building a new life elsewhere. On the other hand, Iraqis who have been away for many years or several decades are keen to return and are anxious to contribute to re-building and helping education and industry in Iraq. Yet a mechanism is lacking to make such a return an easy practical process. This paper proposes a detailed plan for the Iraqi authorities to implement this very idea.

Rotational system of visiting scientists:

People are willing to come and help Iraq in education and science. However, they need a clear and complete step by step mechanism to guide them through this process and to address their needs along the way. The rotational system of visiting scientists is the proposed mechanism of return and it may be easily be implemented under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education and it entails the following general steps the details of which should be worked out after establishing a team to run the implementation:

A) Identify the Iraqi institutions and the geographical areas that are in need of such support and seek their approval to accept visiting scholars.

- B) Establish a pool of scientists and academics abroad who are interested to participate and identify their areas of expertise, the duration which they want to serve and their preference for the geographical area that they will be in.
- C) Establish a procedure to match the visiting scholar with an institution and a specific department based on the criteria in B and the needs identified in A.
- D) After matching the scholar with an Iraqi institution, the implementation team must assist the visiting scholar with all logistics of return such as travel requirements (passport, transportation, arrival in Iraq ...etc), arrange for appropriate housing, orientation and consultation with members from the host institution and developing a work strategy for how best to use the skills and efforts of the visiting scholar.
- E) At the end of the visiting scholar's service, an evaluation session is conducted with the host institution as members of the Ministry of higher education. The visiting scholar may choose to continue to work in Iraq in the same institution, in another institution or to go back to country of residence.

Benefits

There are many benefits to this mechanism of return. First, fresh expertise will be integrated in the existing education system on a continuous basis. This would inspire and energize students and faculty alike and introduce new methods of learning, international databases and up to date textbooks and materials. In addition, the visiting faculty would also benefit from this trial period during which

he/she can get a clear picture of the status of the facilities, level of students and even his/ her own living and working conditions.

This system is only part of an over all effort to preserve science in Iraq Other efforts must include incentives for existing faculty to stay and to be successful and productive, facilities update and renovation and providing training abroad for existing Iraqi faculty.