A Report of a Midterm Evaluation of the Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Rewarding Academic Excellence
ENPI/2010/249-791

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lebanese Association for Educational Studies has been contracted by the Delegation of the European Union to undertake a “Mid-term Evaluation of the Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Rewarding Academic Excellence.” This is an EU-funded UNRWA-implemented project based on Contribution Agreement no. ENPI/2010/249-791 concluded between EU and UNRWA.

According to the Terms of Reference, the overall objective of this project is “to contribute to the economic self-reliance of young Palestinian refugees resident in Lebanon, by improving their access to the labour market.” The specific objective of the project is to provide qualified Palestine refugees students with the opportunity to pursue an academic education at universities in Lebanon, thereby increasing their opportunities of finding employment.”

The programme provides a full-tuition grant for a complete undergraduate course of study (for 3-5 years) at a university in Lebanon chosen by the student. The grant is supplemented by a stipend of a maximum of EUR 500 to cover the cost of books, transportation and other similar expenses. Although no ceiling is set for a grant per student per year, a statistical formula is used setting the maximum total tuition cost for any one student at a little over USD 51,000. Since such maximum is needed as a guide so that the total EU grant is distributed among as many students as possible, the formula seems to be achieving this purpose and does not need to be changed. Although the stipend is set at a maximum of EUR500, recipients are paid USD366 each, except for students of the national Lebanese University who are paid the maximum amount as their tuition fees are minimal.

For an evaluation of the progress of the project, reports of similar previous projects were reviewed, and meetings and interviews were held with UNRWA senior staff and other members of the Selection Committee. Our principal contact with UNRWA was Mr. Mohammed Ali, Project manager and Head of the Scholarship Unit with whom we met several times and who provided us with all necessary information. We attended three sessions he held with the students of Galilee Secondary School where he presented the scholarship programme in detail and answered all questions raised by the students. We also had an opportunity to participate in a wrap-up session of a career guidance workshop offered by the European Training Foundation and attended by several UNRWA school registrars who have responsibility for career counseling at their schools. Mr. Ali also organized a focus group meeting for us with a small group of scholarship students where we discussed various aspects of the programme. We also visited Beirut Arab University where around 75% of the students study, and had an informative meeting with the University’s Deputy Secretary-General for student affairs.

This report includes a review of the following topics with commentaries and recommendations on each:
1. **The selection process:** Eligibility requirements are clearly spelled out. Applicants must be Palestinian refugees in their last year of secondary study at an UNRWA or a Lebanese public school or at a private school where they were paying no tuition fees. The main criterion for selection of students for scholarships is satisfactory (60%) performance on the Lebanese Bacc II examinations. Eligible applicants are ranked in one of four lists according to their Bacc II scores, and grants are allocated as follows: 7% for General Sciences students, 43% for Life Sciences, 43% for Economics/Sociology, and 7% for Humanities. The procedure seems transparent and efficient and it provides a measure of equity, though in certain cases a question of fairness might be raised when a student with a low score in humanities, for example, is given priority for admission over another with a higher score in science. To deal with such situations, we are recommending a certain degree of alignment between a Bacc II streams and “corresponding” fields of study at the university. We are also recommending that due to the shortcomings of the Bacc II exam, another performance measure is also used like the student’s school records or Brevet results. We also raise the question of whether socio-economic condition needs to be considered in cases of hardship.

2. **Choice of university and field of study, and gender distribution:** An overwhelming majority of scholarship recipients have chosen to join Beirut Arab University. In terms of fields of study, students’ choices have concentrated on engineering, business and the sciences. We are recommending that through career guidance and academic support, students are encouraged to apply to other top universities like AUB, LAU, and the public Lebanese University (LU), and to consider other fields of study which may have better employment prospects like health sciences, nursing, physiotherapy, teaching, and information technology. It is also noted that over 60% of recipients are females, and this percentage seems to be on the increase. An effort is needed to restore gender balance by encouraging more males to apply.

3. **The Selection Committee:** The committee is composed of two UNRWA staff, four members of the Palestinian community, and two EU observers. It oversees the selection process and approves the list of recommended recipients. It also considers selection policies and procedures. Thanks to the careful preparation of the Scholarship Unit, the work of the committee seems to run smoothly, though some members may have different views on policies and procedures. We believe the committee could benefit by adding three or four members from the academic and business community as well as a representative of students or graduates.

4. **Scholarship administration:** There is now a well-established set-up for the administration of the programme consisting of three units: The Scholarship Unit, the Career Guidance Unit, and the Employment Service Unit. The first unit successfully and efficiently operates a well planned all year programme starting with an “awareness campaign” reaching all secondary students and ending with the final selection of scholarship recipients. The second unit organizes career guidance activities starting with Grade 9, and the third is to help graduating students find adequate employment. Its separation from career guidance will help focus its work on employment service. The Career Guidance Units needs to be empowered with specialists to support the
management responsibilities of the unit head, and the school registrars/counselors who are in charge of career guidance at the schools require time release and ongoing professional development to perform their duties properly. Recent plans to engage the European Training Foundation (ETF) in providing them with professional development represent an important step in the right direction. Through their work at the schools, the Scholarship and Career Guidance work closely with the UNRWA Education Department. We raise the question of whether bringing them together with that department in one large unit might not enable them to perform their work even more effectively.

5. **Public communication and visibility:** A well designed public communication plan for the scholarship programme is in place. A variety of EU/UNRWA branded brochures, posters and printed and online announcements are distributed widely to schools and UNRWA area offices as well as to community organizations. The fact that the number of applicants has risen to over 700 indicates that students have been receiving adequate information and have been motivated to apply. Special efforts need to continue to be made to make sure all Palestinian students outside UNRWA schools receive timely information and are included in career guidance activities. Besides the annual award ceremony, a graduation ceremony could be started to enhance the status of the programme and provide additional visibility to the sponsor and the donor. More frequent coverage of the programme in Lebanese media could also be sought.

6. **Employment prospects:** Due to restrictions on the employment of Palestinians in Lebanon and decreased opportunities for them to work in the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, employment prospects have not been promising. UNRWA has been conducting studies on the employment of scholarship graduates compared to other Palestinian and to Lebanese university graduates. It is expected that the newly activated Employment Service Unit will be particularly helpful in monitoring the labour market and in directing students to promising fields of study and to relevant job opportunities in and outside Lebanon. It is also important that students are made aware of relatively high unemployment rates in “popular” fields like engineering and business so that they consider other areas like health sciences, nursing, nutrition, physiotherapy and lab technology. The issue of female unemployment also needs special attention. Perhaps female scholarship applicants need to make a commitment to seek employment actively upon graduation. Since many females go into teaching regardless of their field of study, it may be useful to prepare them for the job through a post-bachelor one year Teaching Diploma programme offered by several universities.

7. **Prospects of an Alumni Association:** For several years there have been attempts to form an alumni association, but unfortunately, they have not been successful; for as soon as they graduate, students get occupied with work and family life, and some of them leave the country. It is suggested that new efforts are made to start a small group of current students (with a few graduates) to look after the interests of both students and graduates and hold activities starting with BAU where most students are concentrated. The proposed graduation ceremony should help build an “esprit de corps” among them. Using members’ services as mentors or employment informants plus representing them on the
Selection Committee would also provide them with a sense of ownership of the association.

8. **Sustainability:** Since EU/UNRWA scholarship programmes were started, there has been an ongoing effort to build a structure that would insure the proper administration of those programmes. The three current units which are the components of this structure and their efficient and effective performance form the basis of the programme’s sustainability. There have been active attempts to provide scholarship opportunities for Palestinian university graduates (e.g., Mahmoud Abbas Fund, Unite Lebanon Youth Project, and Palestinian Student Fund), but it is generally agreed that the UNRWA scholarship programme will need the financial support of the European Union for the foreseeable future.
INTRODUCTION*

The Lebanese Association for Educational Studies has been contracted by the European Union, represented by the Delegation of the European Union in Lebanon, to undertake a “Mid-term Evaluation of the Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Rewarding Academic Excellence”. This is an EU-funded UNRWA-implemented project based on contribution agreement no. ENPI/2010/249-791 concluded between EU and UNRWA. It is a follow-up of two previous EU-funded UNRWA scholarship schemes: the “EU Scholarship Fund for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon” (EUR 1.1 million, with one intake of students in 2005) and the “EU Scholarships for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon” (EUR 3 million, three intakes of students in 2007/2008, 2008/2009 and 2009/2010). Combined, these two projects have allowed UNRWA to provide university education for 200 Palestinian students.

According to the Terms of Reference, the overall objective of this project is “to contribute to the economic self-reliance of young Palestinian refugees resident in Lebanon, by improving their access to the labour market”.

“The specific objective of the project is to provide qualified Palestine refugees students with the opportunity to pursue an academic education at universities in Lebanon, thereby increasing their opportunities of finding employment”.

The following results are expected upon the completion of the project:

- No fewer than 150 qualified Palestinian students enrolled at university for an undergraduate degree.
- UNRWA Scholarship Unit and Placement and Career Guidance Unit (PCGU) better equipped to offer professional and academic coaching and job-seeking advice for scholarship applicants, grantees and graduates,
- Networking amongst scholarship graduates to enhance the social capital of the group and the programme sustainability initiated and supported by UNRWA.

The Lebanese Association for Educational Studies (LAES) has been contracted to provide the EU Delegation in Lebanon with an overall, independent and accountable mid-term evaluation of the project with a view to improve its performance and “to propose recommendations for the next phase of the programme”.

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*The writer would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Mrs. Salia Hoteit to the preparation and writing of this report.
METHODOLOGY

The topics to be covered in this evaluation report are the following:

1. The selection procedure of students as carried out by the Selection Committee
2. Scholarship administration (including administration with universities)
3. Public communication on the scholarship programme to raise its visibility
4. Progress on capacity development of UNRWA staff in academic coaching and career guidance
5. The employment status of grantees
6. Progress in the set-up of an alumni association
7. Sustainability prospects of the programme

Previous reports and records of meetings provided us with a meaningful background to the variety of issues involved in those topics. For a fuller understanding of the issues and their implications, we held a series of interviews with the following UNRWA senior staff and Selection Committee members:

- Mr. Salvatore Lombardo Director of UNRWA Affairs Lebanon
- Mr. Roger Davies Deputy Director of UNRWA Affairs
- Mr. Jeremie Delage Field Programme Support Officer
- Mr. Walid Al-Khatib Chief, Field Education Programme
- Mr. Mohammed Ali Project Manager – Scholarship Unit
- Mr. Khaled Dgheim Head, Career Guidance Unit
- Dr. Anies Al-Hroub Member, Selection Committee
- Mr. Salim Karroum Member, Selection Committee
- Mrs. Olfat Mahmoud Member, Selection Committee
- Mr. Raja Matar Member, Selection Committee

A meeting was also held with Mr. Mohammad Hammoud, Deputy Secretary General for Student Affairs at Beirut Arab University where three quarters of the scholarship recipients are enrolled. We also attended presentations of the programme by the Head of the Scholarship Unit, Mr. Mohammed Ali, to three groups of students at Galilee School and talked to some students and teachers.

We also had an opportunity to participate in a wrap-up session of a career guidance workshop offered by the European Training Foundation (ETF) and attended by several UNRWA school registrars with the Head of the Career Guidance Unit, Mr. Khaled Dgheim. Talking to the registrars was of particular importance as they are assigned the function of career counseling and guidance at their respective schools.
A meeting was also held with a small focus group of students where various issues relevant to the program were discussed. Other students responded in writing to a set of questions dealing with those issues.

The series of interviews and meetings was concluded with a wrap-up meeting with Mr. Lombardo, Mr. Davis and Mr. Ali who was our principal contact with UNRWA throughout the period of this review and who was extremely helpful and extended full assistance to us.

The interviews, visits and meetings enabled us to acquire an adequate understanding of the issues at hand and an appreciation of the different and, in certain cases, differing approaches to dealing with those issues. In the following sections of the report, the issues involved in each of the topics cited earlier will be explored and analyzed in light of the information we have gathered, and recommendations for dealing with them will be offered. The recommendations will be made in line with the objectives of the project, the results to be achieved and the views of those concerned.

**THE SELECTION PROCESS**

**The Scholarship Programme:** The programme provides a full-tuition grant for a complete undergraduate course of study (3-5 years) at a university in Lebanon chosen by the student. The grant is supplemented by a stipend of a maximum of EUR500 for other expenses (books, transportation, etc.). The total annual expenditure towards the scholarship programme must not exceed the amount allocated by the EU to UNRWA for this purpose.

No ceiling amount per student per year is set; the programme guarantees covering the tuition fees of a student who maintains good academic standing despite any raise in tuition fees during their period of study. However, according to a statistical formula adopted in the agreement, total maximum expenditure on a student's tuition fees has been calculated at a little over USD51,000 (minutes of Scholarship Advisory Committee, 16/9/2011).

The stipend amount actually paid at present to each scholarship recipient is USD366 to cover the cost of books, transportation and other similar expenses. The stipend is raised to the maximum of EUR500 for students enrolled at the (public) Lebanese University as an incentive to apply to this university of good standing where fees are minimal.

**Eligibility:** Eligibility requirements are clearly spelled out as follows:

Eligibility for UNRWA Scholarships is open to all those who meet all of the following criteria:

1. The applicant is a Palestinian refugee registered with the Lebanon Field in UNRWA, or is a non-registered or non-identified Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon.
2. Applicants satisfy UNRWA that they have not had to pay for their pre-tertiary education (this is automatic for students who completed their studies at UNRWA schools or Lebanese public schools).
3. They have Lebanese standard Baccalaureate II gained within the 12-month period immediately prior to the date of proposed study at university.
4. They are not currently enrolled in any university course of study.
5. They do not have any nationality other than the Palestinian one.
6. They have applied for one or more university degree course.
7. They have an average in the Baccalaureate II of not less than 60%.

**Selection criteria:** The main criterion for selection of students for scholarships is their academic performance as indicated in their results on the Lebanese Bacc II examinations. Eligible applicants are ranked in one of four lists according to their Bacc II scores in one of the four Bacc II streams: General Sciences, Life Sciences, Economics and Sociology, and Humanities. Proportions of selected applicants from each category have been determined on the basis of the distribution of secondary students as follows: General sciences: 7%; Life sciences: 43%; Economics and sociology: 43%; and Humanities: 7%. The list of recommended scholarship recipients is prepared by the Scholarship Unit for the approval of the Selection Committee and final approval by the Director of UNRWA Affairs and the head of the EU Delegation.

The present procedure seems transparent and efficient. A student and his parents would know clearly why he or she was or was not selected for a scholarship. The question is whether Bacc II results are adequate as the sole indicator of a student’s academic performance considering that the validity of results is sometimes brought to question due to certain reported cases of cheating. In a recent study it was noted that “malpractices range from quietly allowing candidates to cheat to allowing candidates to discuss questions in groups to suggesting answers and circulating the scripts of candidates from top schools among other candidates” (Vlaardingerbroek and Shehab, 2011). Besides, contemporary assessment policies emphasize a cumulative approach to assessment rather than a “one shot exam.” Universities in Lebanon usually base their admissions on the student’s school record and on certain entrance examinations; they only require passing the Bacc II as a condition for admission as stipulated by Lebanese law.

We are inclined to suggest that a student’s school record is added as another criterion for selection and given a weight of about 25%, and a coordinated effort is made between the Scholarship Unit and the Education Department at UNRWA to set up a procedure for reporting a reliable and valid academic record by UNRWA secondary schools. However, we are informed that this would be difficult to implement and will not be accepted by the community. It could be used in cases where two or more students may have earned the same score on the Bacc exam. A “safer” alternative is to use the Brevet results of three years earlier, as was suggested, though a student’s cognitive and psychological abilities and dispositions may have changed considerably over that period. In certain cases, sub-scores of particular subjects within the Bacc report might be useful as a reference.

The practice which has been adopted to differentiate the ranking of applicants in accordance with their respective area of concentration (i.e. top 7% of General Science applicants, 43% of Life Sciences, 43% of Economics and Sociology, and 7% of Humanities) seems to provide a measure of equity as it is expected to reflect the distribution of students registered in each of those streams; however, an objection is raised that, in certain cases, it rewards a student with a lower score in one stream at the expense of another with a higher score in another stream who is going into the same field of study. Such a situation could be avoided by aligning the four Bacc II streams or areas of concentration with the respective fields of study at the university and using this alignment as a guide when considering applications for scholarships. For example, if there are enough applications for engineering from students who studied the General Sciences or Life Sciences streams, the priority would go to them as their choice of university field of study is aligned with their Bacc II stream which, presumably, had better prepared them for that field.
Figure 1 presents a possible listing aligning Bacc II streams with some university fields of study that could be used as a guide. Exceptions could of course be made according to the Selection Committee’s discretion.

Figure 1. Bacc II Streams and Fields of Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bacc. II Stream</th>
<th>University Field of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Sciences and Life Sciences:</td>
<td>Biochemistry, biology +Teaching Diploma (T.D.), biomedical science, chemistry (+T.D.), computer science, engineering, health sciences, mathematics (+T.D.), medical lab, pharmacy, physics (+T.D.), sciences (+T.D.), and OTHER SUBJECTS LISTED UNDER ALL STREAMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology and Economics, and Humanities</td>
<td>Business, economics (+T.D.), sociology (+T.D.), literature (+T.D.), history (+T.D.), and OTHER SUBJECTS LISTED UNDER &quot;ALL STREAMS&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Streams</td>
<td>Architecture, communication arts/media/journalism/advertising; elementary education, graphic design, information technology, nursing, nutrition, philosophy, physiotherapy, psychology; social work, translation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This discussion of selection criteria has focused on the academic criterion which, as mentioned earlier, has virtually been the sole criterion for selection. There is reference in programme documents, however, to socio-economic condition as another possible criterion. Although socio-economic condition is presumably considered in the list of eligibility requirements (applicant must be a registered refugee, attended UNRWA or Lebanese public school, or attended private school on a scholarship), our attention is brought to the fact that the UNRWA social affairs department maintains lists of families who are considered hardship cases. Students coming from those families could perhaps be given some priority as their applications are considered. The Selection Committee’s concern for objectivity and fairness could still be maintained as such families are formally classified by UNRWA as hardship families.

Scholarship Students’ Distribution by University, Field of Study, and Gender

An overwhelming majority of scholarship recipients choose to join Beirut Arab University (BAU): 74% of the whole group of current students and 75% of the 2011-12 intake are enrolled at BAU. A few seem to be attracted to the Lebanese International University (LIU) which enrolls over 13% of the whole group and 10% of this year’s intake. The rest of the students are scattered in very small numbers at several other universities. Unfortunately, only a small percentage has been enrolled at the national Lebanese University LU (see Tables 1 and 2).

Why do most students go to BAU? In the words of one respondent, “BAU is the university of the Palestinians. Students go there because they feel at home. It is less expensive than the other good universities, has a good academic reputation, and admission is not so difficult though students sometimes need to take courses to improve their English.” Yet although BAU has a generally good academic reputation, it is advisable that qualified Palestinian students also benefit from other first-rate universities like the American University of Beirut (AUB) and Lebanese
American University (LAU) as well as the Lebanese University (LU) and thus improve their chances for adequate employment upon graduation. To gain admission to AUB and LAU, they will need to attain an appropriate standard of English proficiency, have a good school record, and do well on the SAT examination. In cooperation with Palestinian donors, interested Grade 11 students could be offered a summer intensive English and SAT preparation programme of six weeks which could be continued on week-ends during the Grade 12 school year. The sizable reduction in fees for ten students at each of AUB (Annex A) and LAU* is an opportunity that should be utilized in full. At present there are only 4 students at each of AUB and LAU.

Students also need to be encouraged to join the Lebanese university which includes a good number of faculties of high academic standing. We are informed that the LU administration has been approached to consider giving special consideration for the admission of Palestinian refugee students. The recent increase in the stipend for students who join LU (whose fees are minimal) to EUR500 might serve as an incentive for students to apply there. On the other hand, until a quality assurance higher education law is enacted for the country, it is advisable that priority be given to enrollment at trusteeship-owned universities like BAU, LU, AUB, LAU, USJ, Balamand, and NDU. Scholarships at other institutions could still be authorized in special cases (like enrolling in a major which is not offered at other universities).

In terms of fields of study, Table 1 shows that the three most popular fields among current scholarship students are architecture and engineering (45%), business (21%), and the sciences (20%). The three fields maintain their lead in the 2011-2012 intake as shown in Table 2: 32% for architecture and engineering, 26% for the sciences, and 21% for business**. It is noted that very few students have chosen fields like communication arts, computer science, education, graphic design, lab technology, nursing, nutrition and physiotherapy.

The gender distribution of scholarship students is skewed in favor of females. Table 1 shows that, of the whole group of current students, 58.4% are females and 41.6% are males. The gap is even wider in the 2011-12 intake where 67% are females and 33% are males.

“Engineering at BAU” is the most favoured choice of males, followed by business, while females go for the sciences and business, and few choose engineering and architecture. As a matter of fact “Sciences at BAU” is the exclusive choice of females. Male students seem to follow a prevailing trend of studying engineering at BAU, then going to work in the Gulf countries or Saudi Arabia. With strong restrictions on employment of non-Lebanese engineers in Lebanon, they can only hope to find mainly quasi-engineering jobs with lower pay. Although job opportunities in the Gulf for Palestinian engineers are now fewer than before, the engineering option remains popular among male students.

* An agreement with LAU has not been formalized, but according to the Scholarship Unit Project Manager, it has taken effect and is applied to currently enrolled students.

** This seems to be a well-established trend among Palestinian students as reported by the Palestinian Students Fund. Of 1,850 students who received loans from the Fund over a ten-year period (2000-2010), 35% studied engineering, 26.7% sciences, and 17.7% business. A promising proportion of 6.4% went into nursing, however.
Table 1. Distribution of Current Students by University, Field of Study, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>University *</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AUB</td>
<td>AUL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture &amp; Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Arts – Radio/TV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Design</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Lab</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiotherapy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premedical Biology</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% by university</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* University abbreviations:
AUB: American University of Beirut; AUL: Arts, Sciences & Technology University in Lebanon; AUST: American University of Science and Technology; BAU: Beirut Arab University; GU: Global University; HCU: Hariri Canadian University; LAU: Lebanese American University; LU: Lebanese University; LIU: Lebanese International University
Table 2. Distribution of 2011-12 Intake by University, Field of Study, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M (N)</th>
<th>F (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Engineering</td>
<td>AUB</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>AUST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Balamand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Arts – Radio/TV</td>
<td>GU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentistry</td>
<td>HCU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>LAU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>LIU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>LU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Lab</td>
<td>Total (N)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>% by university</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sciences option is taken by female students because it leads to the License d’enseignement which qualifies them to teach at the secondary level at UNRWA and perhaps certain private schools. However, we are informed that a good proportion of female graduates remain unemployed either because they do not find suitable jobs (in terms of type, location or pay), or because their particular subculture does not favour female employment. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that the following fields in which one or two students are enrolled have all been chosen by female students: architecture, biomedical sciences, communication arts, dentistry, graphic design, medical lab, nursing, pharmacy, and translation. It seems in order to suggest trying to attract more students to those fields – some females from the sciences and some males from engineering or business. Ideally, such a shift might be achieved through career education and guidance, but a more direct policy that some other scholarship programmes also follow is to allocate scholarships to fields of study in certain proportions. The EU and UNRWA might wish to consider an allocation guide such as the following, based on community needs (e.g. health sciences, nursing, teaching) and employment prospects (e.g. engineering, business, information technology):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Scholarship Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Architecture</td>
<td>25-30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>15-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching of Sciences/Math/Social St</td>
<td>10-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences and Nursing</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other fields</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those percentages are suggested on the basis of the knowledge and skills taught in each secondary stream vis-à-vis the requirements and skills relevant to each field of study. Regarding the engineering fields, the Lebanese Order of Engineers lists civil, mechanical, electrical/computer and communication engineering, architecture and agricultural engineering. Perhaps except for the latter, they are generally comparable in terms of status, employment prospects and beginning salary.

The gender imbalance among scholarship students seems to be an ongoing trend and needs to receive special attention. The imbalance is probably a reflection of the gender distribution of secondary students. It is generally observed that females attain higher test scores than males, and it is possible that this is the case in Baccalaureate results. If so, a high proportion of females will continue to appear among scholarship recipients as long as Bacc results remain the sole measure of academic performance. A matter of consideration in this connection is the fact that a sizable proportion of female graduates either do not seek or do not find appropriate employment, and hence the scholarship objective of economic self improvement remains unattained in such cases.

On the other hand, university education for women will, of course, have a positive impact on family life. Nevertheless, more male students need to be encouraged to apply for scholarships and a higher proportion should be provided with academic support to be able to receive them.

The Selection Committee: The responsibilities of the Selection Committee are currently defined as follows:

1. Award of scholarship at the beginning of each academic year.
2. Annual review of the selection/award procedures (in compliance with the general rules and spirit of the EU/UNRWA agreement) at least one month before the scholarship announcement.
3. Endorsement of annual reports and plans.
4. Consultations on student requests, complaints, discontinuation of scholarships, etc. The Committee shall have the discretionary power to allow a beneficiary of the scholarship programme to either change their programme of study or take a leave of absence in the midst of studies, for a reason other than academic achievement. Restraints on budget shall be the overriding factor in deciding what shall and shall not be permissible.

Under present policy, all decisions of the Selection Committee must be approved in writing by the Director of UNRWA Affairs and the Head of EU Delegation before taking effect.
The Selection Committee membership is currently composed of the following members:

- Mr. Salvatore Lombardo, Director of UNRWA Affairs Lebanon (Chairman)
- Mr. Mohammed Ali, Project Manager – Scholarship Unit, UNRWA (Secretariat)
- Mr. Salim Karroum, Operations, First National Bank
- Mrs. Olfat Mahmoud, Palestinian Women’s Humanitarian Organization
- Mr. Raja Matar, Palestinian Student Fund
- Ms. Lenka Vitkova, EU delegate (Observer)
- Mr. Juan Sanchez Conde, EU delegate (Observer)

In our meetings with members of the committee, they expressed their satisfaction with the careful preparation of the list of scholarship applicants who are recommended for approval and the meticulous application of the academic performance criterion represented by the Bacc II exam results. Some felt that “the work was done for them” and they had little to contribute beyond approving those lists. At other times, they said they had vivid discussions of the most appropriate ways to ensure fairness and transparency and maintain the effectiveness of the scholarship programme. The fact that they are associated with organizations and NGOs that are in close touch with the Palestinian community enables them to perform their role as committee members ably and effectively.

The committee will probably benefit from adding a few more members from the academic and business community and meet more frequently to discuss important policy issues at length. It would also be useful to have one or two scholarship graduates on the committee representing the hoped-for Alumni Association.

**SCHOLARSHIP ADMINISTRATION**

The administration of scholarship affairs is entrusted to the Scholarship Unit presently headed by Mr. Mohammad Ali who has the title of Project Manager. In a detailed Action Plan (Annex B), activities are spelled out from starting an “awareness campaign” in early November 2011 to selection of scholarship recipients and making relevant public announcements in the media in December 2011 (Annexes C, D and E). Mr. Ali, together with Mr. Khaled Dgheim, Head of the Career Guidance Unit, report to the Field Programme Support Officer, Mr. Jeremie Delage who in turn reports to the Deputy Director of UNRWA Affairs, Mr. Roger Davies. The Career Guidance Unit used to include placement also, but this is now the responsibility of a separate employment services unit, also reporting to Mr. Delage. It is to be noted that the scholarship and career units are separate from the Education Department headed by Mr. Walid Al-Khatib, chief of the Field Education Programme, who is responsible for UNRWA schools (Figure 2), but they coordinate their activities with the administrations and registrars of the schools. Since a considerable part of their work is with and at the schools, it may be worth considering their closer association or merger with the Education Department. This would allow a more active involvement in career education on the part of the school as a whole - administration, registrars, teachers, students and parents.
The ground work that the Project Manager does as he informs students of eligibility conditions for the scholarships and the application and selection procedures serves as a bridge for entry into the university by scholarship recipients. The meetings he held with secondary students in our presence were informative and stimulating, and addressed a wide variety of concerns and questions raised by the students. Equally, the current scholarship students we met reported that they had received adequate information on the application process. By the time applicants are granted the scholarships, they would have developed a basic familiarity with their university, particularly those joining Beirut Arab University (BAU) where they would meet many fellow Palestinians, including friends and acquaintances and sometimes relatives. These informal associations make their first experience at the university go more smoothly than at the other universities where that element of congeniality may be lacking due to the small number of scholarship students. It is in such cases that a special effort needs to be made to assist new students and identify old students who would serve as mentors to the new ones whenever that is possible.

We are informed that the Scholarship Unit has maintained good relations with the universities concerned, not only in terms of arrangements for the payment of fees which sometimes needs to be deferred, but also in other administrative matters related to student welfare. Mr. Mohammad Hammoud, BAU Deputy Secretary General for student affairs, confirmed that the university has had good relations with UNRWA and that there is good coordination between the two institutions. He said that the Palestinian student population at BAU numbers around 1800 students, i.e., 15% of the university student body: “They like BAU because of its atmosphere, good education and reasonable tuition fees,” he said. Students coming from UNRWA schools do better than others, and the top ten UNRWA students get a 10% discount. Mr. Hammoud said BAU was unable to offer larger discounts on tuition fees because its fees are already lower than those of other universities of good standards, and lacking grants and endowments, it is left with tuition fees as its only source of income. He said the University looks after its students in many ways: There is an academic adviser for every student to help guide them through their degrees,
there are some employment opportunities for students at the university as lab assistants or assistants to teachers, and although the university does not have a placement office, students are assisted in seeking employment.

The few students enrolled at other universities require special attention and support. Follow-up beyond checking their academic record is essential. Though UNRWA staff resources are limited and cannot possibly cover all individual cases, some form of personal or online communication needs to be maintained.

The contacts that UNRWA has initiated with top universities like AUB and LAU are to be welcomed, particularly that the constraint of high tuition fees at those two universities is softened by a proposed discount of about 50% for ten students at each university. The Scholarship Unit is to be encouraged to continue to build relations with those and similar universities in the country.

The first semester is probably the most crucial time for a new student at a university. They could benefit from support by old students who could serve as their mentors, meet with them periodically and plan social functions with them to share experiences. A continuation of such activities in the following semesters, even on a smaller scale, will help build an esprit de corps among them that would feed into an alumni association. Students who were contacted indicated that such periodic meetings are necessary and would be useful.

The academic success of the scholarship recipient remains the most important goal for the student as well as for the programme. Payment of a semester’s fees is contingent upon satisfactory performance in the previous semester, and students who do not do well are asked to pay for courses they fail and are cautioned about the possibility of discontinuing their scholarship grant. This is well in order; however, it would be necessary to follow up on such cases and explore the reasons behind a student’s low performance with them first, then with their instructors and advisors, and perhaps encourage them to seek assistance from a university counselor. University advisers who may not have much time to deal with individual student concerns need to be alerted to the necessity of giving special attention to scholarship students who need support and guidance.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

A considerable part of the “UNRWA Scholarship Project-Visibility Plan for 2011-2013” (Annex F) has been implemented. We are informed that the following activities have been conducted:

1. Outreach visits to schools to conduct awareness lectures about the EU scholarship programme for students, parents and education providers (March-April, November, 2011)

2. Televised discussion about the scholarship programme (summer 2011)

3. Ceremony to hand out letters of award to the new scholars for the academic year 2011-12 (December 2011)

4. Short documentary on education for Palestine refugees (in progress)
5. Production of a film on education co-funded between the EU Education Project (PQ351) and the most recent EU Scholarship Project (in preparation)

A well designed public communication plan for the scholarship programme is in place. A variety of brochures, posters and printed and online announcements are distributed widely to schools and UNRWA area offices as well as to community organizations. The “awareness campaign” by the Scholarship Unit is serving to enhance the visibility of the programme through sharing a well prepared information package with students, parents, school administrators and registrars/counselors. A special effort is made (and needs to be enhanced) to reach Palestinian students in Lebanese public (and some private) schools throughout the country. The information materials that we have seen are clear, comprehensive and include answers to possible questions that may be asked by students, parents and members of the Palestinian community. The “awarding ceremony”, besides raising the morale of recipients and their parents through public recognition of their achievement, also helps to provide visibility for the programme. The graduation ceremony mentioned in the Plan would also serve similar purposes and stimulate interest in belonging to an alumni association. The current use of websites and facebook is helping maintain regular communication with secondary students and scholarship recipients.

In as much as the Palestinian community is part of the larger Lebanese community, the visibility of the programme is spread beyond Palestinian circles to include press releases to all Lebanese media and university offices of information. Besides enhancing the status of the programme, this helps highlight the valuable service provided by the EU through the programme.

**CAREER GUIDANCE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

Career guidance sessions are currently offered to students in grades 9 through 12. Grade 9 students have two orientation sessions that cover interest inventories, educational paths from Brevet to University, including academic and technical and vocational education, factors affecting students’ choices of their vocation, and market and employment-related courses.

Grade 10 and 11 students are offered two similar orientation sessions with increased emphasis on streams available for Baccalaureate II students, university disciplines, planning and decision-making skills influencing the general success of the student. Grade 12 students are also offered two orientation sessions that cover the basic information outlined above in addition to additional focus on applying to universities and understanding the different university disciplines. All orientation sessions also describe courses available at UNRWA’s two vocational training centers: Siblin Training Center (STC) and North Training Center (NTC).

A three-day “Career Guidance Capacity Building Workshop” was conducted late November 2011 for the UNRWA school registrars by representatives of the European Training Foundation (ETF). The workshop focused on discussing strategic issues that would help plan and implement a career guidance program in both regular and VET schools.

Several points were raised by the registrars that help shape recommendations for capacity building in this area. The main concern is the little time available for career guidance and the large number of students that each registrar has to work with and follow-up on. At this rate, any career guidance training efforts would not bear fruit unless the registrar’s time is freed enough to be able to allocate around 40-50% of their overall work to career guidance activities.
Mention was made of the four Employment Service Centers (ESCs) that currently work with Palestinian graduates in Lebanon in general. The registrars can make use of the available ESCs as resource centers for it would be very informative for secondary level students to become aware of the services provided by the ESCs should they need to utilize them.

Figure 3 is a chart that outlines the distribution of career guidance and placement activities across the secondary school grades and through graduation from the university.

**Figure 3. A Career Guidance and Placement Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Who</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 9 &amp; 10</td>
<td>Career education and orientation</td>
<td>School administration, teachers, registrars, guest speakers, Career Guidance Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Grades 11 &amp;12</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career guidance (choice of fields of study)</td>
<td>Career Guidance Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scholarship information</td>
<td><strong>University</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Filling applications</td>
<td><strong>Years 1 &amp; 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Fellow students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Advising</td>
<td>Faculty advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up on academic progress and payment of fees</td>
<td>Scholarship Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social/ cultural activities</td>
<td>Student groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3+</td>
<td>Job search, CV preparation, letter writing, interview skills, placement</td>
<td>Employment Services Unit, University placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Ceremony</td>
<td>EU/UNRWA personnel, University faculty, Graduates, Association officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awards</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing Placement and Follow-up</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pins</td>
<td>Keeping files up-to-date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Association membership</td>
<td>Keeping in touch with employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informing graduates of new opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Employment Services Unit, Alumni Association</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that career counseling needs to be preceded by general career education in earlier years where children acquire an understanding of the role of work in meaningful living and the type of jobs available in society and needed for societal life. Such career-related knowledge, attitudes and values should permeate the variety of curriculum areas.

Another relevant point is that career counseling is not totally separate from the whole academic and personal counseling function which schools undertake. The counseling that a child receives (or does not receive) at school could influence their continuation at school, achievement, motivation and, eventually, the vocation with which they end up. In a recent study on UNRWA school dropouts (Al-Hroub, 2011), the lack of adequate guidance and counseling in UNRWA schools was identified by teachers and administrators as a potential cause of dropping out among Palestinian students. The study points to the shortage of teacher-counselors and qualified counselors, given the large number of students.
### Employment Prospects

It is well known and documented that Lebanese laws and employment practices place severe restrictions on the employment of Palestinians in the country (Hanafi and Tiltnes, 2008). In spite of legislative action in the last two years to relax such restrictions, this has hardly had any tangible effect. Palestinians have thus had to seek casual, low-paying jobs that would help meet some of their basic living needs. A “Socio-Economic Survey of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon” published in 2010 describes the general employment status and prospects of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Chaaban et al., 2010). The study reports a positive correlation between income and level of education but does underline the fact that even university graduates rarely obtain jobs that are in line with their fields of study and up to the standard of their degrees. A law approved by the Lebanese parliament in 2010 states that Palestinian refugee workers are exempt from the conditions of reciprocity that are stated in the Labor Law and Social Security Law, and have the same rights as Lebanese labourers upon being discharged from work. The law does not, however, address the problem of being allowed to practice liberal professions. Recent statistics show that around two thirds of those aged 23 to 65 years old with a vocational or university degree are employed, in comparison with around 40% or less for those with lower educational attainment. Of those with a university degree, 70% work as professionals or associated professionals. Thus university degrees lead to higher status employment; however, unfortunately, many professions in Lebanon are barred for Palestinians.

The “Employability Survey of Palestinian Graduates at Beirut Arab University” (Annex G) was conducted by UNRWA at the end of 2010 to compare the employability of UNRWA’s Scholarship Alumni with the employment situations of other Palestinian graduates who had pursued tertiary education without receiving financial aid from UNRWA. The survey focused solely on graduates from Beirut Arab University (BAU) as it enrolls the majority of UNRWA scholars and other Palestinian students.

The main finding of the survey is that:

> “With 30% of graduates not working or not willing to work, UNRWA scholars have a much higher unemployment rate than other Palestinian graduates who are not selected by the Scholarship Programme. Even in terms of the quality of jobs secured, UNRWA scholars’ positions are generally lower, less stable, less related to the graduates’ studies and less well-paid”.

Several key variables help explain these striking differences. The first is related to gender, for the survey shows that the unemployment rate of the female UNRWA scholars is 13% higher than that of other female Palestinian graduates. Moreover, only 4% of the male scholars are unemployed versus 34% of the female scholars. This is the result of the limited employment opportunities available on the job market for some of the majors chosen by the female scholars, like literature, for example; but it also has to do with cultural considerations like the desirability
of female employment and/or the conditions required for employment like proximity to home and a “safe” social environment.

The higher unemployment rate among male scholarship graduates (vs. non-scholarship graduates) may partly be due to their high job expectations and their tendency to resist starting their careers with the low positions that other Palestinian graduates use to gain work experience and advance towards higher positions. The UNRWA scholars want to begin employment with relatively good, well-paid positions, which are in fact less readily available. The small number of female graduates who do seek employment are less demanding and expect less than men, which leads them to accept first jobs that are low-skilled and low-paid, but they tend to evolve to better positions with better salaries.

Another factor that could explain the higher unemployment rate among scholarship graduates is related to work mobility, for they are viewed as less mobile and not as able to travel abroad for better paid and more stable positions like their other Palestinian colleagues who come from non-UNRWA schools and who were raised in an environment that encourages this type of mobility.

Breakdown of employment rates by field of study shows that graduates from the sciences and health sciences fields have high employment rates, albeit with lower salaries. Graduates from engineering have lower employment rates but the highest salaries. Graduates from business or literature have the biggest difficulty finding employment.

Thirty-one percent of the UNRWA scholars who graduated from engineering are unemployed. Despite the fact that upon comparison of all faculties, the engineering faculty gives access to the most stable jobs and the highest salaries, it is the other Palestinian engineering graduates who fare better than the UNRWA scholars. Over half the graduates are employed abroad, again with fewer opportunities for the UNRWA scholars who are less mobile.

Graduates from the Faculty of Sciences do not differ significantly in employability prospects. Nearly all become teachers, mostly employed by UNRWA schools. Graduates from the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry or Health Sciences have the lowest unemployment rate, but the absolute number of the graduates from these faculties is low compared to the other faculties as there are fewer scholarships available.

Of the business graduates, 32% of the UNRWA scholars are unemployed. Employment prospects for these graduates are poor, their salaries are low and their jobs low-skilled and unstable. Once more, the compounding factors are the same: more than 80% of the business graduates are female, and some of them do not seek employment while others do not easily find financially and socially suitable jobs.

Another study, the “Employability Survey of Scholarship Alumni” (Annex H) was conducted by UNRWA to help the Scholarship Unit identify the obstacles facing the students in accessing the labor market and to enhance the career guidance services available to Palestinian students. A
comparison was made with Lebanese students, based on a survey conducted by the American University of Beirut in 2009 on “Higher Education and Labor market Outcomes in Lebanon”.

The main results highlighted by the survey are the high unemployment rate of Palestinian graduates compared to Lebanese ones, especially for women, and the difficult access that Palestinian graduates have to the labor market, especially in the time needed to find their first jobs. Moreover, once Palestinian graduates do find jobs, these are usually short-term jobs with low salaries.

The survey identifies several factors that underlie these conditions. The first concerns job-search skills: More than half find a job through UNRWA or by hearing about it from friends or relatives, and few seek opportunities outside Lebanon, as compared to the Lebanese students. The second relates to choice of majors: Palestinian students choose majors and universities that do not allow a good access to the job market. The study identified Beirut Arab University as the university with the highest unemployment rates (35%). The scholars chose majors like sciences, where very few find jobs that relate directly to their field of study, business, or engineering, which have the highest unemployment rates. The study identifies discrimination as another factor playing a role in Palestinian students’ employability. Employment for graduates of business and engineering is in fact high for Lebanese students. In addition, Lebanese and Palestinian students with the same university degree get very different salaries after graduation.

An article published in the Lebanese An-nahar Newspaper earlier this year (April 21, 2011) showcased the results of a survey of 250 Palestinian students in their “early years” of university studies. When asked about what influenced their choice of field of study, 47% of the students replied that employability was the major decisive variable, followed by the economic situation (33%), personal interest (5%), availability of opportunities (7%), and scholarship restrictions on fields of study (4%).

The main implications of the findings cited in these studies suggest that career guidance, job coaching, and placement efforts should address the different needs of male and female graduates. Despite the fact that the proportion of female UNRWA scholars is double that of the males, the employment opportunities are relatively low, particularly in jobs that directly relate to their field of study with satisfactory pay and work conditions. Special attention needs to be made to placement efforts and employment opportunities for graduates from business or literary majors who have difficulty finding jobs.

The results also point to the key role of career guidance during the school years in orienting students to the various methods to locate suitable jobs and to acquire the skills associated with job search. The UNRWA employability studies that have been summarized provide excellent insights into what a career guidance program should include in order to help develop in students an ability to make realistic choices of the fields of study that could be conducive to appropriate employment and the universities which offer best chances of employment.
Unfortunately, the social, economic and political conditions of Palestinians in Lebanon are not likely to witness drastic improvement in the foreseeable future, and their current situation will continue to have a negative impact on their employment opportunities. “The inability of Palestinian students to choose their occupations freely has led to general depression and lack of motivation among students with respect to education” (Al-Hroub, 2011). Nevertheless, UNRWA scholars, if adequately prepared and properly advised to choose to study the “right” field of study at the “right” university and empowered with the skills of job search, they should be able to attain the economic self-reliance foreseen by the EU/UNRWA programme.

PROSPECTS OF AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

The Alumni Association is perhaps the only item in the Visibility Plan for 2011-2013 that has not met much success. According to UNRWA officials, graduates do not seem to have shown considerable enthusiasm to this idea. As students advance in their university studies from year to year, they seem to concentrate on their graduation and their post-graduation employment possibilities. As graduates, their concerns shift to a new phase in their life focusing on career and family.

In our opinion, an alumni and students association is an important networking mechanism that will help reinforce the effectiveness of the scholarship programme at the selection stage, during university years and in the world of work. If association representatives are included in the Selection Committee, they could offer valuable advice on the selection policies and procedures that are followed. At the university the association could provide important help to the scholarship unit in setting up mentoring arrangements for new students and organizing social and cultural activities as well as providing academic support to students who need it. The association could assist the Career Guidance Unit by sending members to talk to students about various major fields and the jobs to which they would lead. It could also work closely with the Employment Services Unit.

We suggest that a concerted effort towards a students and alumni association be started through a leading small group of students and graduates from Beirut Arab University where most scholarship recipients get their degrees. Once an association “nucleus” is well established, the circle could be widened through communication with the whole group of graduates and current students.

The Facebook page which has been started recently by the Scholarship Unit (and which already has over 200 respondents) could also be used to promote the idea of a student and alumni association. At present, the Facebook page provides information about the unit and includes announcements about job fairs and job vacancies as well as scholarships for graduate study.
SUSTAINABILITY PROSPECTS

There is general agreement that the EU/UNRWA Scholarship Programme can only be sustained through the annual monetary allocation that is made by the European Union. Essential as it is, this is just one necessary condition, however; for beyond the financial aspect, the sustainability of the programme is maintained by the policies and procedures that have been agreed upon by the EU and UNRWA as a basis to govern its operations, and by the commitment UNRWA has shown through setting up a structure within the organization to ensure the proper administration of the programme from career orientation and guidance to announcement, selection and administration of scholarships, to identifying and providing employment opportunities for graduates. It is noted that this “scholarship infra-structure” that UNRWA has built is helping to administer the several other scholarship schemes that have been made available by other donors. It is hoped that the efficiency with which the EU Scholarship Programme is managed will encourage other donors to offer their resources to UNRWA in a similar manner. It is also important to acknowledge the cooperation and coordination that exist between this programme and those of other donors like United Lebanon Youth Project, Palestinian Students Fund and others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The current scholarship programme stipulates that no fewer than 150 students should have benefited from the programme by the end of its three-year duration. It is commendable to note that this figure has been achieved through the first two of the three intakes of students, and it is reasonable to expect that the total number of beneficiaries will exceed 200. It is also understandable that the desire of all concerned is to maximize the number of recipients, thus spreading the benefit to the community as far as possible. On the other hand, a positive feature of the programme is that it combines numbers with quality by offering opportunities to highly able students to join top universities which may charge higher fees but provide high quality education.

2. The present selection procedure is clear, carefully thought out, and transparent, thus receiving apparent general satisfaction from the community. A question might be raised, however, about the adequacy of limiting the measurement of academic performance to one sole criterion, i.e., the Bacc II score, particularly that the validity of such a score has been doubted because of reported examination malpractice and other reasons. The Selection Committee would do well to consider other supplementary means such as sub-scores of certain areas within the Bacc results, the brevet results and/or the school records at the secondary level. Although there are known reservations about school grades, we believe that their advantages outweigh such reservations, for they generally provide a cumulative, long-term view of a student’s academic knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, the difficulties of persuading the public of their adequacy and impartiality are understandable.

3. The stipend of USD 366 given to scholarship recipients beyond tuition fees is necessary indeed and serving an important purpose. Some students wondered whether it could be increased in view of rising expenses, particularly in transportation costs for BAU engineering
students who now have to travel daily to the new location of their engineering school in Dibbiyyeh to the south of Beirut. The raise of the stipend to EUR500 for students of the Lebanese University where fees are minimal is well justified and needs to be increased as an incentive to join this university which enjoys a generally good reputation. A suggestion was also made to cover the cost of application and examination fees for students who choose to apply to universities like AUB, LAU, NDU and Balamand. This matter is worthy of consideration if more students are to be encouraged to choose such universities.

4. The importance of allowing students the freedom of choice of university and field of study is recognized. It needs to be noted, however, that this policy is resulting in a rather heavy concentration of student choices on engineering, business and the sciences, and in mainly one university, the BAU. Besides, the exclusive reliance on Bacc II scores in the selection process is leading to a skewed distribution of recipients in terms of gender. On a long-term basis, these issues need to be addressed through an active career guidance programme, but for the immediate future, it may be worth considering setting some guidelines like the following:

- Setting a maximum limit on number of scholarship recipients at any one university  
  (Although BAU is a well established university which has traditionally housed the bulk of Palestinian students, there has been a high unemployment rate among its UNRWA graduates, 31% in engineering and 32% in business (page 21). Besides, setting the above limit would encourage qualified students to apply to the other top universities as well).

- Setting a maximum limit on number of recipients in any one field of study

- Giving priority to students who have secured admission to the other well-established, trusteeship universities like AUB, LAU, NDU, Balamand as well as the national Lebanese University, and to fields like nursing, physiotherapy, health sciences and other fields for which employment opportunities are more readily available

- Seeking to attain gender balance among recipients through encouraging more male students to excel in their secondary studies and apply for scholarship grants, and asking female students for a commitment to actively seek employment upon graduation.

It is recognized that such a policy might not be received well by some students and their parents, but in our judgment, it would ensure a more effective use of the scholarship grant.

5. Capacity building in the domain of career guidance needs to be maintained as a top priority. As noted in the introduction to this report, one of the three main expected results of this project is that this unit is “better equipped to offer professional and academic coaching...” To perform its function adequately, the Career Guidance Unit needs to be equipped with a well qualified body of professional staff that would support the management duties of the unit head. The proposed staff development plan for the registrars and counselors of UNRWA schools deserves full support.

6. It is advisable to start a career education programme (within the general school curriculum) as early at the intermediate level as possible to serve as a basis for career orientation and guidance in later years where students would receive comprehensive exposure to the variety of jobs that require a university degree and the courses of study that lead to them as well as to
available jobs that Palestinian students could realistically aspire to have. While it is not desirable that students are led to “stick” to just one option as a field of study or occupation, their career education is to help them define their desired fields of university study on the basis of their abilities, interests and employment potential.

7. The establishment and activation of a separate unit for employment services is commendable. It will serve as an effective liaison between employers and the scholarship and career guidance units. The enormous difficulties faced by Palestinians in finding reasonably satisfactory employment underline the crucial importance of this unit and the necessity for constant monitoring of employment conditions in the country and the region. Once an alumni association is finally established, association members can be of valuable service to the unit as they take jobs in various areas of work.

8. It is recommended that close association is maintained between the Scholarship Unit and the Career Guidance Unit on one hand and the Education Department on the other, perhaps to the point of merger at some appropriate time. The department houses the secondary schools where much of the work of the two units is done. The Scholarship Unit staff visit the schools regularly to inform students about the programme, hold orientation sessions for them, receive and process their applications, and advise grantees of next steps. The Career Guidance Unit is even more involved with the schools. It needs to plan with them on a regular basis details of a career education programme which should be an integral part of the school curriculum. The school registrars who also serve as career counselors will probably do their work more effectively if their administrative and career counseling work is done within the same administrative unit.

9. The Selection Committee may wish to consider conducting interviews with short listed applicants in light of the short essays they were asked to write in their applications. Although the element of subjectivity is high in this case, a small weight of 5% might be justifiable. The seriousness of female students about their intent to actively seek employment upon graduation could also be assessed during such interviews.

10. It is recommended that graduates and senior students are invited to work towards an alumni and student association. This is an important means to achieve the third main result expected of this project, i.e., “networking among scholarship graduates to enhance the social capital of the group…”. The association could be instrumental in assisting the Scholarship, Career Guidance, and Employment Services units in orienting students about universities and employment-related fields of study, offering assistance to them through their university years, and helping them in their job search as they near graduation. The launching of the association needs to be given top priority by all concerned.

11. A sizable number of recipients are enrolled in the sciences at BAU, and a smaller number study literature, sociology or economics; some end up teaching and others remain unemployed. It is recommended that those of them planning to go into teaching study an extra year for a Teaching Diploma at AUB, LAU or USJ. Alternatively, they could do a B.S. or B.A. and Teaching Diploma at one of those universities. In either case, they would complete the programme within four years of study and presumably benefit from the tuition discount
which those universities offer. They would then qualify for the License d'Enseignement which would improve their employment possibilities considerably.

12. Recognizing a low level of proficiency in English among students at UNRWA schools, the agency has been working to improve their level with the assistance of the British Council and other organizations. This is indeed a matter of priority as a higher level of English proficiency will provide applicants to top universities with a better chance of admission to those universities as well as enable them to perform well in their academic work from their first year. Intensive English courses in summer for Grade 11 students would be a move in the right direction.

13. It is recommended that three or four members are added to the Selection Committee from among leading Palestinian academicians, businessmen, and human resources specialists so that the committee is constantly up-to-date on academic and employment developments. The inclusion of one or two student and graduate representatives on the committee will also provide fresh input and signal an important role for the hoped-for alumni association.

14. There does not seem to be a consensus among those concerned on co-funding. Since each individual scholarship grant covers the full tuition fees plus a stipend, co-funding is not seen to be necessary except in cases where the fees of a certain field of study like medicine, for example, far exceed the maximum amount of a scholarship. Our understanding is that such cases are currently referred to other donor grants which could accommodate them. It remains important that all major scholarship programmes supporting Palestinian university study coordinate their activities so that they complement each other’s work. Student applications would then be directed to the programme which is most likely to meet their expectations. Examples: 1) Students wishing to study abroad would be advised to apply to a Fund that offers such an opportunity; 2) English proficiency and SAT preparation courses could be organized for all those interested and financed by a Fund whose budget might include a provision for such an activity; 3) Various donors would exchange information on employment opportunities.
REFERENCES


Palestinian Students Fund, “That they May Face Life with Dignity.” (a brochure)

UNRWA, Employability survey of scholarship alumni (2003-2009)

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