

Lebanese Higher Education

Trends and Developments

February 2010

Introduction

Lebanon's higher education is the oldest in the region. It goes back to 1866 when the American University of Beirut (AUB) was founded under the name of the Syrian Evangelical College, followed by the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) in 1875, then by the Lebanese American University (LAU) in 1947 as a Beirut College for Women. The Lebanese University (LU) which is the only public university in the country was founded in 1951. Haigazian University was founded in 1955, followed by the Beirut Arab University (BAU) in 1960 in collaboration with the Egyptian university of Alexandria. Most of the 40 higher education institutions currently running in Lebanon was legalised in the late nineties when the private sector flourished in a sudden and rapid expansion following the 15 year civil war that hit Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 and which had a very damaging impact on the sector of higher education of the country.

The freedom and the independence of the Lebanese higher education are protected by the Constitution.

Tertiary education in Lebanon is divided in two categories, the vocational tertiary education and the general or non vocational higher education.

The **tertiary vocational** post secondary education is totally managed by the Directorate General for Vocational and Technical Education (DGVTE) and is not considered as part of the higher education sector. In short, tertiary vocational education is delivered by technical public and private schools. Students that have successfully finished their general secondary school or their Professional Baccalaureate are entitled to proceed further to get one of the following national diplomas through national exams: the TS (after 3 years with 31 fields of study), LT, IT or LET (2 more years with 9 fields of study). 11% of the total university students are enrolled in the TS. The transfer from vocational education to non vocational education is not well organised and only few higher education institutions accept students holding a degree from a vocational school. Although largely debated, there is no clear vision or mechanism to organise the relationship between general education and VTE as to whether VTE graduates should be allowed to join universities. Students in tertiary vocational education count to around 14500 in the public sector and around 11600 in the private sector.

Non vocational higher education referred to as simply **Higher Education** is governed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The student population in

higher education counts to around 195000 according to the figures of the academic year 2007-2008 out of which 43% are enrolled in the Lebanese University. 54% of the student university populations are females. The same figures show that 175000 students are enrolled in bachelor degrees, 17500 in Masters degrees and 2100 in doctoral studies leading to a PhD degree.

Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education (ISCED levels 5 and 6): 47.6 (2004)

Ratio of enrolment for ages 20-24 is 30%.

It is worth noting that the education expenditure in percentage of GDP (2000) in Lebanon was 13.1% divided into public expenditures (4.1%) and private expenditures (9.1%).

Finally, it is also important to note the existence of a national body CNRS (National Council for Scientific Research) aiming to support and develop the Research activities in Lebanon.

Responsible national authority

As stated earlier the Lebanese Higher Education is governed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The main law that regulates the private sector of higher education was issued in 1961 by which a Council for Higher Education was established with a mechanism of licensing new higher education institutions. The LU is governed by its own law and has its own autonomous structure.

Many decrees were subsequently issued to regulate the sector. The most important decrees of 1996 modernised the 1961 law and set the conditions and the criteria for a higher education institution to be legalised, to be given the permission to operate and to be audited through special technical committees. One of these decrees set the criteria for establishing a type of a "university institute of technology". Another decree set up a committee for the equivalence and recognition of diplomas, an exercise which had been practised since 1957 through a joint committee in charge of the equivalence of all qualifications in both pre-university and higher education. Other laws dealing with the organisation of practicing some professions like medicine and engineering have existed since 1957.

In 2002, a Directorate General for Higher Education (DGHE) was established to regulate the private higher education sector, supervise and coordinate all actions related to it. The DGHE is in charge of the 39 private higher education institutions running now in the country while the only state Lebanese University (LU) enjoys a clear autonomy with its own system of governance.

In 2003, the DGHE made the first attempt to carry out an audit of private universities.

A new bylaw is recently prepared and is to be submitted to the government for approval.

Higher education institutions

There are two types of higher education institutions:

- 1) A university which must start with at least 3 faculties one of which should be for human sciences and another should be for sciences. These can deliver all degrees from bachelor degrees to doctoral studies.
- 2) A "university institute of technology" or a "university college" should start with at least one faculty. Most of these deliver Bachelor degrees. Few, in special cases, can deliver higher degrees.

Among the 40 private higher education institutions running in Lebanon, there are 28 full universities including the state Lebanese University, 8 university institutes or colleges and 4 religious higher education institutions.

The Lebanese university has 17 faculties and consists of 50 branches distributed all over the country. It offered 105 programmes with qualifications from bachelors to PhDs.

The Lebanese University is a large centralised institution headed by a President and governed by a Council of University in which each faculty is represented by its dean and one academic elected by the teaching staff. Students should have also 2 representatives in this Council; the government is also represented by 2 experts chosen among highly qualified personalities. The President, with the Council of the University and through the deans of the faculties, has a powerful authority on the management of the university. Each dean is managing the branches of his/her faculty through a Director of the branch. Therefore this is a much centralised way of governance through a solid hierarchy.

The picture in the private sector is not much different. All the universities started with a main campus at the capital Beirut or in Mount Lebanon. Few started their action outside Beirut like the university of Balamand in Tripoli, the Hariri Canadian University in Mechref. Recently, due to the increasing demand on higher education, universities have started opening branches in the different Lebanese regions managed by an academic staff reporting directly to the central administration of the university.

160 programmes are offered by the private sector leading to a number of qualifications. The first degree offered in higher education is a bachelor degree (BSc or BA) obtained after 3 years of study following the secondary school baccalaureate. Then the student needs 2 more years of study to get a Masters degree (MSc or MA). A teaching diploma (TD) can be obtained at the end of 4 years of study after the baccalaureate. A PhD is obtained by a Master graduate student for a period of study lasting for at least 3 years. Qualifications in medical sciences and engineering need different durations of study after the baccalaureate: 5 years to get a degree in engineering, 7 years to get an MD in medicine, 5 years to get a degree in dentistry or pharmacy, 4 years to get a BSc in Physiotherapy.

Academic recognition

No proper quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms are in place at national level. Some higher education institutions have started to implement internal quality control within their structure; some are getting accredited by external international bodies in the USA and from Europe. The MEHE have introduced some quality assurance procedures in their traditional licensing mechanisms supposed to be applied for establishing a higher education institution. The licensing mechanism is applied at the MEHE through the Council of Higher Education and the associated technical committees. The process starts with the receipt of a file that ought to be analysed by a special technical committee which produces a report and carry out some follow-up of the dossier. The Council of Higher education based on the report of the technical committee issues a recommendation for licensing. The final decision on licensing a higher education institution is left to the Council of Ministers. A "start-up" process followed by an audit visit or an on-site visit to verify the institution's compliance with the licensing criteria leads to the recognition of the programmes and the delivered diplomas at the first graduation of students. It is worth noting that several projects have been conducted throughout the Lebanese higher education system in order to study the establishment of a national quality assurance system and an accreditation system. A large part of these projects have been supported by Tempus and UNDP. A new bylaw, recently prepared to be submitted to the government for approval, calls for the implementation of quality assurance procedures in the institutions leading to a sort of accreditation.

National student organisations

There is no official student organization at the national level. However, such organizations exist in each higher education institution. Students are also represented in all committees governing their institutions.

EU education programmes

The three-cycle system is generally adopted in the Lebanese Higher Education. However, some effort is still necessary to complete and harmonize the implementation of the three-cycle systems.

Different credit systems are adopted in the Lebanese Higher Education. ECTS starts to be adopted in many institutions and programmes. This is mainly an impact of the Tempus projects.

Diploma supplement is not yet introduced. However, the importance of the DS is commonly accepted.

There is a current undertaken effort for the definition of a national qualification framework.

Lebanon actively participates to Tempus and Erasmus Mundus programmes.

Information about the Bologna process in general and the EU education programmes in particular is provided through the National Tempus Office and the attached Higher

Education Reform Experts Team. Seminars are regularly organized and brochures are developed and information is distributed largely within the Lebanese Higher Education. Finally, a survey has been conducted in 2008 to determine the challenges and trends for the Lebanese Higher Education modernization.