**Iraq Support to Tertiary Education (P175694)**

**Terms of Reference**

**Short-term Consultant to Support the Note on Higher Education Financing**

**Background**

Tertiary education in Iraq has experienced rapid expansion in recent years but its access is still low in comparison with other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The increased demand for tertiary education has put tremendous pressure on the public tertiary education system in terms of resources. Although the enrollment in public universities has increased 25 percent in the past five years, the spending on tertiary education as a percentage of total public budget expenditure has declined during this time, which could lead to negative impact on system outcomes such as quality. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to prolonged closures of tertiary education institutions (TEIs) in Iraq, putting pressure on the ability of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) to deliver relevant education programs through distance learning and other channels.

Unemployment and inactivity of tertiary graduates in the labor market is a major concern for both the government and TEIs in Iraq. The country’s financial crisis has reduced the number of job opportunities in the public sector while the private sector is still nascent. Competition for the few jobs available in the private sector is intense. Challenge of graduates’ employment is also exacerbated by the mismatch between supply and demand for skills in the labor market. Some 40 percent of 2018 graduates completed degrees in humanities compared to only 10 percent for technical specializations. Some of the specializations being taught are no longer in demand in the labor market. All these have resulted in about a quarter of graduates being unemployed. The tertiary education sector in Iraq is unable to keep up with global trends and respond to national/local socioeconomic development needs.

The lack of adequate resources for the tertiary education sector is exacerbated by the low budget execution rates observed in many parts of Iraq’s public budget. The MoHESR, for example, spent only 11 and 13 percent of its education sector investment budget allocation in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Execution rates for non-personnel recurrent categories are also typically low; only the employee compensation line items are usually executed at 90 percent or more. The reasons for the under-utilization of budgeted non-salary expenses are numerous and complex, and gaining a deeper understanding into this phenomenon is the main purpose of this consultancy.

**Duties and Accountabilities**

* Identify and interview relevant government and university officials for gathering data and necessary information, coordinating presentations of results, and validating findings and recommendations.
* Assist in the collection of financial and non-financial data concerning the higher education system in Iraq from national sources (including, among others, the MoHESR, Ministry of Finance, Central Statistical Organization, public and private universities, and other relevant entities).
* Assist in the analysis and interpretation of gathered data to inform conclusions about the causes and challenges of higher education financing in Iraq.
* Gather and analyze qualitative information about the financing of higher education in Iraq, including detailed aspects of public financial management, funding flows, institutional arrangements, resource management, and budget execution, among others.
* Contribute to the drafting of an analytical note with policy recommendations aimed at reforming the financing of higher education in Iraq for better results.
* Perform other related tasks as requested by the Task Team Leader.

**Minimum Qualifications**

* Bachelor’s degree (master’s preferred) in public policy/administration, economics, education, or another relevant field.
* At least 2 years of experience in higher education policy, administration, research, or finance; public administration, financial management, or budgeting; or another relevant field.
* Oral and written fluency in English and Arabic languages; ability to synthesize and summarize information in preparing high-quality written outputs in English.
* Thorough understanding of higher education policy and financing in Iraq, including the flow of funds between the central budget, the MoHESR, and public universities.
* Ability to collect, manage, analyze, and present data from a variety of sources using Microsoft Excel and/or other commonly used statistical software packages.
* Ability to identify and interview relevant government and university officials to deepen the understanding of higher education financing processes and challenges in Iraq.
* Outstanding inter-personal skills with proven ability to work cooperatively within a multi-cultural team.
* High degree of motivation, initiative, flexibility, reliability, and responsiveness to changing demands and circumstances; capacity for effective multitasking, with demonstrated ability of being an independent starter with minimal supervision, and a high capacity to persevere for results.

**Administrative Details**

* The duration of the assignment will be approximately 40 working days between September 2021 and June 2022.
* The consultant will report to Xiaonan Cao (Task Team Leader) and Igor Kheyfets (lead for note on higher education financing).
* The work will be carried out inside Iraq – primarily in Baghdad with limited travel possible outside of Baghdad (e.g., for visiting universities). No travel outside of Iraq is envisioned as part of this assignment.

*If you are interested in applying for this position, please send your CV and cover letter to* iraqasa@worldbank.org*.*