

A nighttime photograph of a street in Libya, viewed through a large stone archway. The street is paved with cobblestones and leads to a brightly lit building with arched windows. Several cars are parked or moving in the distance. In the foreground, the silhouettes of three people walking away from the camera are visible. A sign with Arabic text is mounted on the right side of the archway.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN LIBYA

Challenges and Recommendations

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The project has been co-sponsored by Edexcel and Pearson and is now in its fourth year.

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INTRODUCTION



The aim of this brief document is to present a set of reflections on the current education landscape in Libya with a particular focus on technical and vocational education and the challenges around employer engagement. The context for this piece, explained further in the next part of the document, is the recent event held in Tripoli and co-hosted by the Libyan Ministry of Education and the British Council. This conversation sits within a wider context of immense change in the design of education systems globally, and is held against a backdrop of significant debate around the future shape of education and the relationship education has with employment across the world.

The document is divided into three main sections. In the first, the context is presented with an overview of the current Libyan situation and, alongside this, an explanation of the objectives of the event. Second, the main challenges facing Libya in terms of TVET and employer engagement are presented. These challenges represent a distillation of the various presentations, workshops and informal conversations held during the course of the event. Third, a set of recommendations is offered, again as a reflection on both the input of participants during the event and as a response to the challenges identified.

The thoughts and reflections presented here are designed to contribute something meaningful and accessible to the debate. They do not represent the opinions of the author; nor do they conform to a particular educational ideology. This is clearly an exciting and challenging time for education reform, in Libya and across the world. Open and honest debate will be one of the key drivers for success, and this document aims to be a contribution to that process.

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PART 1: **CONTEXT**

In recent years Libya has put in place a sophisticated education infrastructure, commonly viewed as amongst the best in Africa. As far back as 2006, a World Bank report cited Libyan public expenditure on the education sector as amongst the highest in the world. Investment has seen significant growth in the number of institutions and, accordingly, a steady increase in the number of students in higher and further education. In 1975, the number of university under-graduates was estimated to be around 13,500. As of 2004, this number has increased to more than 200,000, with an extra 70,000 enrolled in the higher technical and vocational sector.



Currently, the Libyan economy depends primarily upon revenues from the oil sector, which constitute practically all export earnings and about one-quarter of GDP. Plans are beginning to be implemented to grow the oil industry and increase production. Alongside this, there is an emerging movement to build a new knowledge-based economy, with high levels of support from the education sector. As Gibril Eljrush, Dean of the Engineering Faculty at the 7th October University in Misurata puts it:

“The main aim of Libya’s higher education strategy is to set up a knowledge-based Libyan society and promote science-based industrial development”

Alongside this Libya has seen significant investment in recent years, both inward and external, in the hospitality sector with around 10 international hotel groups planning new luxury openings in the next 18 months. In addition, a recent report looking at the dynamics of the Libyan economy cited the financial sector as being of growing importance with increasing opportunities for employment. The country has also seen the implementation of innovation hubs in three major cities over recent months, signalling a shift towards a more entrepreneurial economic model.

Perhaps as a result of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi’s one year role as Chairman of the African Union, Libya takes its regional responsibilities in the education sector very seriously. The establishment of the Libyan National Economic Development Board in 2007 has seen the emergence of an ambitious scheme concentrated on the development of Libya as an Educational Hub of Excellence, particularly in

relation to Africa. A ‘multiversity’ approach is driving this scheme with Libyan institutions working in partnership with internationally recognized universities. Within this, it is envisioned that much stronger links will be created between the education sector and industry in Libya and it is hoped that this new scheme will respond to a demand for higher quality education across Africa, offering better educational opportunities to students beyond national borders and acting as a catalyst to building human capital across the region.

The expansion of the oil industry and the requirements emerging from a new strategic economic direction for Libya as a whole will require a strong and effective education system that can produce graduates that are skilled, motivated and capable of supporting new businesses within a highly competitive global economy. However, according to the Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010 Libya is ranked 88th out of 132 – scoring in the bottom one-third against the all important education/training/skills indicators. Consequently, many international evaluators have questioned the quality of education provided by Libya’s higher, further and technical institutions. Furthermore, evidence suggests that Libya has few forward-looking technical or industrial research facilities, which are vital if the objective of building a knowledge-based economy is to be realised. Additionally, there are currently few structures in place that support the interaction of industry with education. With existing industries looking to expand and new industries being established, an effective interface between employers, educators and policy makers is vital if workforce requirements are to be satisfied.

“It takes 18 months to turn a graduate into a productive member of staff. That’s too long.”

Chairman, National Oil Company, 2006

The Employer Engagement Conference

The collaboration between the British Council and the Libyan Ministry of Education is focussed on addressing some of the challenges currently facing the Libyan economy and, by extension, the Libyan education system.

The employer engagement event, alongside the ‘Changing Perceptions of Skills’ event that it follows, was designed to bring together experienced practitioners and experts from the UK with policy makers, employers, educators and learners from Libya to share the experiences of the UK in bringing about stronger engagement between employers and educators and to explore the challenges currently facing Libya as it looks to reform and improve its system of technical and vocational education.

During the event, a number of key questions emerged as focal points for discussion:

- What are the current challenges facing Libya in relation to effective employer engagement?
- What other challenges exist around the effective implementation of a well structured and coherent TVET system?
- What are the recommendations for action to address these challenges?

These three questions are directly addressed in the following sections.

PART 2: **SUMMARY** **OF CURRENT** **CHALLENGES**

During the conference, discussions were wide ranging and extended into a variety of complimentary areas. The challenges outlined overleaf have been divided into six key areas. These challenge areas are very much interrelated and the recommendations in the next section will address more than one challenge area.



1. Expanding education provision to meet rising demand from industry whilst maintaining quality

- A number of industries are currently expanding or are planning for significant growth; this will place new demands on the education system to produce appropriately skilled graduates
- While there are some questions in regard of the quality of education provision (in spite of recent levels of investment), there is a danger that expanding education provision will diminish quality further; particular areas of concern include sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified teachers and enough access to well-equipped classrooms and labs
- Rapid expansion is planned in the oil and gas industry; increasing human resource requirements also exist in the financial sector. Evidence suggests that while the requirements are becoming clear, there are concerns over the ability of the current education system to deliver against those requirements
- The hospitality sector is also going to require significant human resources in the coming years – planned expansion of the tourism industry is seeing the construction of a number of international 5 star hotels in Libya and these will need to be staffed to international standards; current provision in this area will not meet the need
- An additional challenge exists around the hospitality industry: the sector is currently made up

predominantly of small companies, one man bands, small hotels and shops, local restaurants and so on: the challenge is how to up-skill a population that has little or no representation or access to and awareness of education?

2. The perception of vocational education and the perceived quality and relevance of Libyan qualifications

- Overall, Libya suffers from a negative perception in relation both to technical and vocational education (in that it is seen as inferior to 'academic' study) and to the overall perception of the quality of the Libyan education experience
- There is currently a culture of individuals being sent away for all or part of their education (particularly those deemed to be 'high flyers'); this is especially true in the oil/gas industry; this is partly because the internationally recognised qualifications are not available in Libya and partly because candidates want the experience of going abroad to study and work
- The culture of sending students away for some part of their education is not inherently a bad thing but it does betray a lack of belief in the overall quality and effectiveness of education in Libya; this also demonstrates a lack of international applicability for some Libyan courses
- There are also challenges around the international accreditation of qualifications with many Libyan qualifications not able to meet international

“The quality of education provision does not match levels of investment.”

Bertlesmann, 2010

standards; again, the oil and gas industry is a case in point here

- The language used in this debate can be problematic: there is discussion around the meaning of/difference between ‘education’ and ‘training’, and, in the same mould, between ‘technical’ and ‘vocational’. This is not useful and needs to be addressed
- The notion that Libyan qualifications are in some way inherently inferior to foreign qualifications is commonly held and yet this is not actually considered to be true by many within industry in Libya
- The Libyan education system needs to improve not only in what it delivers but also in how it is viewed both externally by employers and also internally by learners.

3. The lack of communication between employers, educators and policy makers

- There are a number of key issues here including a definition of workforce requirements and the level and nature of engagement between employers and industry
- There is a sense that there is not enough dialogue between the industry and the colleges so that what is being taught is, in many cases, not well respected by employers or learners
- In the oil industry, the technical institute that is supported by the National Oil Company represents

a notable the exception to this; the institute has 100% uptake of graduates into employment into the industry. However, the number of graduates coming out of these colleges is nowhere near enough to meet the projected demands of the oil industry

- There is a clear need to institute new organisations, new partnerships and new structures to address the challenges of workforce requirements, employer engagement and the development of occupational standards; this is beginning to happen but, in itself, needs research to support it; the British model of sector skills councils could provide one approach for improving employer engagement.

4. Increasing student and employee motivation

- Clear challenges exist around the attitudes of graduates, new employees and learners; there is acknowledgement that however effective your education system is, you have to address these issues as well or learners will not learn and employees will not be effective
- The reasons for this issue of motivation are varied: in terms of employee motivation, it is felt that young people consider some of the jobs that are needed to be done, in the hospitality sector for example, are beneath them
- Salaries have a significant impact on motivation – if you do not earn a great deal, your motivation to work diminishes; this is further exacerbated by the lack of clear career progression pathways and support for ongoing training and development

Because of salary levels, civil servants are often forced to take second jobs to supplement their income.

- Greater engagement in building the quality and relevance of education would be a positive move towards addressing these issues of motivation within education: where students feel the relevance of their education is low, or the quality of the teaching is not there, they will be less inclined to engage positively.

5. Creating a smooth transition between education and employment

- There are significant issues around the transition from education into work; these issues were strongly articulated by the young people who were present at the event
- There is a perception, particularly amongst young people, that employers mistrust the ability of new graduates and, by extension, have little faith in the qualifications they hold
- Industries do not engage enough directly and positively with potential employees within schools and colleges; this should happen as a means of promoting their industries, providing examples of career pathways, demonstrating the kinds of opportunities that exist within an industry and so on
- There is very little in the way of career guidance and support; many learners have a narrow understanding of career choices, with most thinking about pursuing 'standard' professions like engineering and medicine
- Graduates tend to feel rather isolated and cut

adrift when they leave education, lacking as they do the support they need to get into work and the engagement from employers to help them make the transition.

6. The ability to deliver a 21st century education

- The modern workplace requires individuals who are adequately equipped and skilled to handle for the challenges of the 21st century; this, in part, means individuals with a requisite set of 21st century skills alongside other globally transferable qualities required by all employers
- There are suggestions that many teachers currently lack the practical experience required to adequately teach vocational qualifications
- Infrastructure remains an issue – facilities are not yet up to standard in enough schools and colleges to facilitate good teaching practices, particularly practical/experiential learning
- Whilst the notion of internships and voluntary working are accepted as being a positive way of educating people – particularly in relation to 21st century skills – there are cultural and legal barriers to these opportunities being taken up. Some employers argue that young people do not want internships as this constitutes working for free which they are (anecdotally) unwilling to do; some others say that in certain industries (oil and gas for example), they are not allowed to take on interns as they have to be qualified to be on staff for health and safety reasons

- Language and ICT skills are both significant educational challenges with not enough school leavers and graduates up to international standards; this is something that needs to be addressed not only in higher/further and TVET but also in primary/secondary education.

“Current education does not provide a ‘job-ready’ workforce.”

Porter, 2006

PART 3:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having reflected some of the key challenges identified during the event, the list overleaf presents some of the recommendations for action that resulted from the working group sessions on day 2. These recommendations are also informed by the findings of the Effective Education for Employment project which covered much of the same ground.



1. Launch stakeholder engagement and research programmes

- Although the building blocks for a stronger, more effective education system are in place, significant work still needs to be done; this work will require the input of key stakeholders at every stage; research is needed as a means of informing and supporting the development of qualifications, standards and curricula
- All key players should be involved in this consultation including learners, employees and recent graduates as well as educators, employers, policy makers and others; young people should be consulted using technology as well as via more traditional methods
- The development of new strategies, new structures and new programmes will require a significant investment in research to ensure that decisions are based on the right information; a series of ongoing research programmes should be designed and implemented to augment and inform strategic and structural changes and to track impact over time.

2. Expand international collaboration

- There was a clear openness and willingness on the part of Libyan attendees to reach out and connect with the international community as a way of informing the next phase of education development
- The sharing of experiences in this area is vital if the changes taking place are to be successful and if

they are to happen in a timely fashion; this process should involve not only looking at what works but also at what doesn't work

- Collaboration should also take place in the area of accreditation, certification and assessment; there is a stated need for Libyan qualifications to become more internationally benchmarked and, as a consequence, more respected and sought after at home and abroad. This is particularly true in the key growth sectors of oil and gas and hospitality. Appropriate partners need to be sought in this area.

3. Implement career guidance and progression planning service

- There needs to be a much greater focus on career guidance for all young people and particularly those in secondary education; students need to be better informed about their educational choices and about what impact these choices will have on their employment prospects
- Any career guidance service must engage and involve employers fully; employers should build strong and sustainable relationships with schools and colleges and create a much more coherent and ongoing conversation with young people about their industry and about the pathways that exist into particular careers; the service could address the need for a better process of communicating what types of jobs exist within different industries and for informing students of the demand that exists for these jobs

“The financial sector in Libya lacks staff with relevant talent and skills to support growth.”

Leendert, 2010

- A career guidance and progression planning service would also be well placed to assist in addressing the current challenges around transitioning between education and employment; school leavers and graduates need advice, support and mentoring in order to begin their working lives – this service could provide a vital bridge between two sometimes disparate worlds.

4. Establish skills councils

- Currently, the interaction between industry and education is, at best, intermittent with no effective structures in place to facilitate or support dialogue
- The 'skills councils' model – which has been proven to be effective in many countries across the world – provides a means of connecting employers to education; skills councils can address issues around workforce requirements, occupational standards, qualification design, education delivery, apprenticeships and internships
- Some form of organisation must be implemented in every key sector to provide employers with a voice and to improve the relevance of what is being taught, particularly within TVET; all key stakeholders should be involved including employers, educators, policy makers, learners and trade bodies.

5. Empower schools and colleges to deliver 21st century education

- Although Libya has invested heavily in education

infrastructure in recent years, there are still issues in terms of the quality of research facilities, an aging IT infrastructure, the amount of technology in classrooms and so on; investment needs to increase if Libya is to deliver against its stated objectives

- Investment also needs to be directed towards the teaching profession; there is a strong suggestion that the quality of teaching is variable, particularly in relation to TVET, and this has to be addressed if standards are to rise; a firm focus on teacher training and on bringing in teachers from industry should be undertaken
- Experiential learning is critical if learners are to develop skills and become valuable employees; this requires both the right facilities in schools and colleges to create an environment conducive to experiential learning and strong relationships between schools/colleges and employers; current roadblocks to internships, apprenticeships and work placements must be removed and many more places need to be made available.

6. Design a strategy for TVET expansion with a particular focus on oil and gas and hospitality

- Underpinning all reform needs to be a coherent TVET strategy, based on high quality research and stakeholder engagement, that can drive forward modernisation and deal with the challenges set out here
- The planned expansion of the oil and gas industry

In 2003, 86 percent of the population was urban, compared to 45 percent in 1970.

represents a significant challenge that the Libyan education system must meet. Libya has a strong base to work from here but must improve the relevance of what is taught, the quality of the learning experience and the engagement of employers in the entire process

- A draft plan is already in place to support the expansion of the hospitality sector. The implementation of this plan could provide a blueprint for expanding education and training provision in other sectors. Again, the plan should focus on curriculum design, education delivery and effective employer engagement.

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