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Career Counseling & the Higher Education Institute Initiative

Education is an investment in both the future of each individual student and society at large. In an information and technology age, it is essential to equip each and every child with the necessary skills to ensure his or her ability to compete in the global economy. This requires the cooperative efforts of many, including, students, school administrators, teachers, government officials, parents, and the general community, as well as trained school counselors who help facilitate student development and achievement.

Access to strong career guidance and counseling programs that begins early in one's academic career is particularly important to student success. As the door to higher education opens wider and greater numbers of students seek admission, it is important that they understand the variety of institutions and educational programs available to them. It is also important to consider the quality of students secondary school preparation so counselors can help direct them to postsecondary programs that enable them to grow personally and academically, while

simultaneously satisfying the needs of the labor market.

The 21st Century economy provides unique opportunities but also requires specific modern skills. To be successful, individuals must be self-reliant and effective in dealing with the changing job market. In a highly dynamic knowledge based economy, constant learning and training are not simply desirable; they are required. ***Career counselors, therefore, must also learn new skills, stay aware of the latest trends, and provide expanded services.***

Most of the counselors in Qatar lack either the necessary academic qualifications or the required experience and end up working either as social workers or advisers, whose main focus is on helping students apply to universities. However, there is more to career counseling than simply helping students with college applications. Effective career advising and counseling helps students understand their abilities, interests, and values, so they can pursue a career that both fits their own interests and meets the needs of the Qatari labor market.

These counselors will play an essential role in achieving the objectives of **Education of a New Era**. Efforts to provide career counseling services in most Qatari schools are still in their initial stages. Some schools have not included counseling in their educational plan, and the Supreme Education Council (SEC) recognizes the need for greater numbers of well-trained professionals with appropriate counseling and related skills who may become involved in the process of counseling students.

To emphasize the need for a high-quality career counseling system here in Qatar, the HE Sheikha Ahmed Al Mahmoud the Minister of Education & Higher Education and Secretary General of the SEC has instructed the Advising and Career Development Centre of the Higher Education Institute to prepare a long term training program to provide people career counselors with the necessary skills to help students make wise educational decisions.

The training program consists of three phases. The first phase provides school counselors with the essential skills required to help individuals make complex decisions about their future careers or academic pursuits. This phase will be followed by two other phases of advance training in the field.

In December 2008, the Advising and Career Development Center completed the first phase of the training program for career and guidance counselors. This 24-hour training introduced this target group to the field and provided them with the necessary skills to help students understand their own strengths, set goals and make realistic education and career plans.

This phase also enabled the Advising and Career Development Office of



the Higher Education Institute to identify the most active and efficient candidates for further training in the field. Thirty-nine counselors from public, Independent, and private Arabic schools, as well as the Aspire Academy of Excellence, Qatar University and Qatar Foundation participated in the training. The training included presentations, exercises, assignments, role play and projects conducted as well as a presentation on the needs of the Qatari labor market by Dr. Hasan Al Mohannadi, former director in Social Planning Directorate at the Planning Council.

The training also provided an opportunity for counselors to meet one another, discuss their needs, provide suggestions and recommendations, and exchange experiences. On completion of the course, Mr Mohammed Al Mannai, the acting director of the Higher Education Institute, distributed certificates to all trainees. The second phase is expected to

include 60 hours of training and will take place in the beginning of March and will expose the trainees to different types of counseling practices used around the world, specifically the United States.

A renowned American association will, in fact, conduct advanced counseling courses in the field here in Qatar

In addition to covering new aspects of the career counselling process, the third phase also includes 60 hours of training and will focus on major issues featured in the second phase to determine the trainees' mastery of the subject matter.

On completion of the three phases, the counselors who are eligible to apply for the HEI scholarship programs will be encouraged to pursue post-graduate studies in the field.

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