



Kingdom Of Bahrain  
Ministry Of Education  
Secretariat General of the Higher Education Council

# **Future Skills and Preparing Graduates for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**SGHEC**



### Background to the paper

In the twenty first century economy, education plays an increasingly important role in preparing new labor market entrants for the workforce and providing skills upgrading throughout the working career. The vital role of education is reinforced by the rapid pace of technological change, as well as global economic forces. Within this context, the education and workforce development systems are critical for supporting human capital development throughout the life course and to helping Bahrain achieve its vision for 2030.

This paper is a direct result from reading reports, publications and talking to higher education providers about how programmes are being delivered to meet employer's needs both now and the future. The aim of this paper is to provoke Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) into thinking about how programmes and courses are being currently delivered and to examine current suite of programmes offered against the future needs of Bahrain.

### 1.1 Forces Changing the Demand for Skills

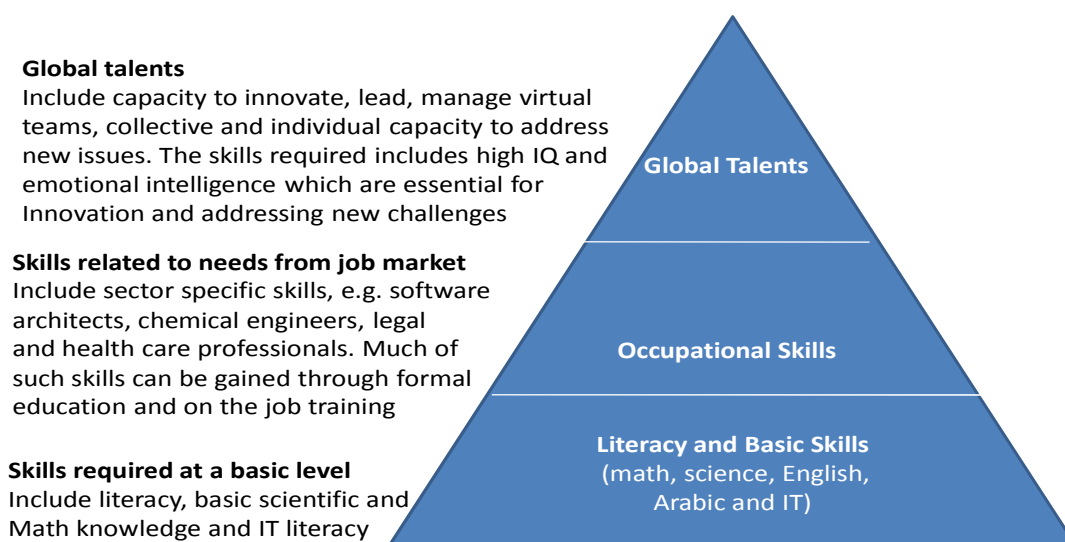
The world economy is characterized by greater economic integration, as well as a more rapid pace of change. These two forces, among others have helped to increase the demand for a more skilled workforce. Likewise, globalization combined with the new information technologies places a premium on interactive and communication skills. Therefore the knowledge based economy that is the key to Bahrain's 2030 vision places a premium on a different set of skills that arguably has been previously undervalued.

#### 1.11. Skills required by a sustainable Bahrain

Skills are a key factor of global competitiveness, developing and retaining the right talent is crucial to a sustainable economy. Having the right skills are a key determinate of competitiveness and growth.



## Skills priorities in Bahrain- Skills pyramid



### 1.12 Current situation in Bahrain

Almost half of graduates in Bahrain plan to enter the workforce immediately after graduating, of those graduates 53.5% intend to work in the private sector with the remaining working in the public sector. No evidence exists to suggest that graduates would look to open their own business (source Allen report 2009).

Approximately 60% of current students in higher education within Bahrain are studying a business related degree, however how does this compare to current job opportunities and those of the future? The biggest areas for current vacancies in Bahrain are as follows;

- Sales and Services
- Management
- Construction

There clearly has been a slowdown in the banking and financial services sector in the last twelve months and the global economic downturn has played a significant role. That said in 2009 the most popular sector to gain employment for graduates was business services with 37.4%.



In the GCC according to the Oman Ministry of Higher Education, 46% of graduates who graduated in 2008 are still looking for work. Graduate employment is a global issue currently with recent graduate unemployment rates in countries such as France, Spain and Greece running between 60%-80%.

### 1.2 Views of the Employer

The most commonly identified skill required across all employers was communication skills (Allen report 2009). This was across small, medium and large employers. Also it was interesting the second most required skill which was the same for all employers was technical skills; however after that the skills needed showed much variation depending on employer size. Other key skills include

- Management skills
- Customer service
- English language

In terms of work related skills employers again had different views regarding importance. For small employers the most important work related skill was customer communication however for medium and large employers the most highly sought after skills included;

- Communication and literacy skills
- Numeracy
- Technical skills
- Planning skills
- Management skills
- Problem solving

### 1.3 Challenges

Include;

- Problems in basic skills outcomes from schooling, in particular English reading and writing
- An oversupply of humanities –social science graduates who often lack employability skills and a shortage of science, mathematics, technology and nursing graduates
- Teaching shortages in areas such as VET, mathematics, science and technology
- Cultural factors play an important role in determining what subject a student may study and what career path they may go down. A negative perception exists around vocational training and young people are still encouraged to follow traditional academic paths.
- A lack of appeal exists regarding certain sectors within the economy

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- Bahrain is exposed to increasing competition from international workers
- Parental pressure to enter fields where the workforce is saturated

## 2. 1 Economic Scenario planning

As a result of the World Economic Forum in 2007, three likely scenarios are probable for Bahrain's economy over a fifteen year period;

Scenario 1- The country continues along current lines

Scenario2- The economy takes a turn for the worse

Scenario 3- The economy improves and the situation is better than hoped for

## 2.2 Scenario 1

Key sectors identified include;

Transport and tourism sectors- in particular aviation and tourism generally

Education sector- including developing educators to provide high quality education services throughout all levels of education

Business and ICT sector- including developing small businesses in Bahrain, continuing to develop the banking and finance sector and to also build consultancy and advisory capacity within Bahrain

Health sector- Health services will need to be provided for Bahrain's expanding population but also GCC countries

On this basis the key skills required would be;

Technical, ICT , banking and finance skills including stakeholder management skills

Specific aviation skills- including logistics, operations, marketing and pilots

Entrepreneurial skills

Hospitality skills- including catering and hotel management

Interpersonal skills- including a more professional attitude to work

Under scenario 1, a focus on skills development should be split between generic and specific skills

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## 2.3 Scenario 2

Under a situation where Bahrain's economy and labor market takes a downward turn as a result of the global financial situation there would be significant changes to the local environment. The impact would be that unemployment would rise, businesses would close and construction would slow down.

In addition to these issues, foreign investment would slow down impacting on business and banking and that the leisure and tourism sectors including catering and hotels would be hit hard.

Key sectors that would become a future of Bahrain under this situation include;

Public sector

Education sector- in particular replacing lost skills that would come with a decreased ex pat labor force and with a focus on vocational skills

Agricultural sector including fishing

Health sector including mental health services

On this basis key skills would include

Innovation and creativity

Key skills including Arabic and English

Financial and business skills

Transport skills- particularly in public transport such as buses

Under this scenario the split will be 60/40 between generic and specific skills



## 2.4 Scenario 3

Where the Bahrain economy and labor market is better than hoped and that the upturn in the economy is significant. The key sectors identified include;

Health- including medical services and medical health services

Transport, tourism and hospitality- as more wealth develops people will consider greater transport and tourism options. Additionally entertainment options would most likely increase as well as hospitality options

Education- a greater pool of talent will be required if Bahrain is to take advantage of its position

Business services and Banking- will grow with the economy and in particular areas such as private banking, investment banking and legal services.

On this basis the skills required under this scenario would include

Management skills

Entrepreneurial skills- as well as consultancy, negotiation and political skills

ICT and telecommunications skills

Health service skills including nursing and mental health

## 3.1 Key findings

- Labor will be increasingly mobile
- Creativity and innovation will be key regardless of the economic situation
- The education and health sector are of key importance to Bahrain's future
- Business development and entrepreneurial skills are seen as highly important



### 3.2 Graduate attributes

Students in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will need to have a set of transferable skills in this digital age. Key skills are as follows;

- Self management- ability to manage own learning development
- Communication- ability to express ideas and opinions with confidence and clarity
- Teamwork- ability to work productively in different kinds of teams
- Problem solving- ability to identify the main feature of a problem and to develop strategies for its resolution
- IT – ability to use IT appropriately for learning and employability
- Language- ability to read and write both Arabic and English to a high standards
- Ethics and a sense of workplace responsibility

### 3.3 Strategic aims for employability

The following aims should be adopted;

- A clear definition of employability which is adopted by all agencies
- Professional Information advice, guidance and support for students in choosing and planning future careers at both High School and University
- The provision of opportunities by Schools, Universities and professional services through which students can develop their skills and attributes for future career choice
- Opportunities to enable students from Bahrain to compete in a GGC market

### 3.3 What is success?

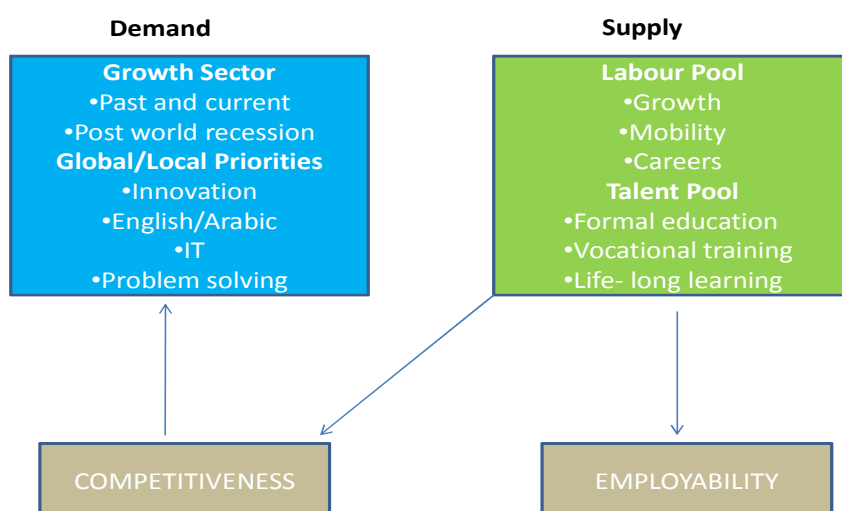
Key indicators from the perspective of the Higher Education Council would include;

- Recognition that employability is the responsibility of the whole University
- Institutional wide awareness among staff and students of employability and how to get support
- Graduate employability improving
- Student's confidence in their own skills and attributes relevant to employability
- Alumni in key positions in and outside of Bahrain



### 3.3 Conclusions

Essentially Bahrain's skills issue is not one of quantity, but rather one of matching between what higher education produces and what industry and society needs. Therefore more there needs to be fluidity, the ability of the skills pool to undergo continuous change and to embrace lifelong learning.



Higher Education as a sector within Bahrain must be able to respond to the needs of students and have a responsibility to prepare them for the rigors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If the higher education sector is able to build into learning and teaching the principals and vision of the key attributes needed/wanted by students then they are more likely to absorb them and demonstrate them whilst on the course and afterwards in life and work. In order to achieve this higher education needs institutions, lecturers and educators who are open to new ideas, new technologies, new ways of working and to recognise that the role that they play in preparing students for life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is changing.



### **3.5 Questions to be answered through events, workshops and seminars over the coming months**

- What are we already doing in Bahraini institutions to develop students' employability skills? Which specific examples can we learn from?
- What has been done elsewhere that we can learn from?
- As a sector in Bahrain, what can we do to promote employability in our graduates?
- Which resources might we find helpful?
- How can we encourage universities and their staff to incorporate employability into curricula?
- What are the challenges, and how can we deal with them?

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