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# POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN QATAR

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EMPLOYER DEMAND, STUDENT CHOICE,  
AND OPTIONS FOR POLICY

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Prepared for the Supreme Education Council



RAND-QATAR POLICY INSTITUTE

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## Summary

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Like the government of many other countries, Qatar's government views education as a crucial element in the nation's economic, social, and political development. Qatar has embarked on reforms at all levels of its education system, the goal being to develop the human capital of Qatari nationals and to ensure that Qatar's citizens can contribute fully to society, both economically and socially.

Progress is being made, but Qatar still faces a number of challenges. The education system for kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) does not adequately prepare Qataris for work or post-secondary study, and current reforms to the K–12 system will take time to bear fruit. The Qatari population is small, and the country depends on a large expatriate workforce for both low- and high-skilled labor. Few Qataris have the training or qualifications needed for high-demand, high-skill jobs. Employment practices, which are linked to the social welfare system, provide Qataris, especially men, with secure, well-compensated jobs in the government sector: Nearly 77 percent of employed Qataris work in the government or government enterprise sectors. And Qatari women, who are more highly educated than Qatari men, are less likely to pursue career employment and have limited employment opportunities because of cultural tradition.

Qatar has used its wealth to improve post-secondary educational opportunities—for example, by establishing a number of world-class institutions in Doha's Education City. But these efforts to enhance the quality of education have not undergone a broad strategic review. As a

result, the extent to which available post-secondary educational offerings can meet Qatar's current and future demands remains uncertain.

Qatar's Supreme Education Council (SEC) asked RAND Education to analyze the current situation and to help articulate priorities for developing post-secondary educational opportunities, either in Qatar or through financed study abroad. The resulting one-year study addressed several questions:

1. In which occupations can Qataris make the greatest contribution to the society and economy, and what education and training are needed to realize these contributions?
2. What measures might encourage more Qataris, especially young men, to pursue post-secondary education?
3. To what extent do existing institutions meet education and training needs? Are new investments required, and if so, where?
4. What are the benefits and costs of establishing local post-secondary institutions at the undergraduate and graduate levels versus sending students abroad for these studies?

## **Data and Methods**

We used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods for the study. To address issues of occupation and skill demand, our research team reviewed secondary data and research from Qatar's Planning Council, formally interviewed key employers in Qatar, and informally discussed relevant issues with other education stakeholders.

The study team also inventoried the post-secondary educational offerings in Qatar, including private training organizations, and obtained data on Qatar's scholarship programs, which support high-achieving students studying in Qatar and abroad.

Many decisionmakers in Qatar recognize that the education and employment choices made by Qataris are often not well aligned with Qatar's new national priorities and initiatives, but evidence for why these choices are made has been mostly anecdotal. To shed light on the factors influencing education and employment choices, we used two

surveys to gather systematic data that allowed us to generalize: a telephone survey of 99 Qataris who had graduated from secondary school in 1998, and a survey administered to 260 students who were secondary school seniors in 2006. The survey of the 1998 graduates provided a look at the transition to post-secondary education and employment in the eight years following graduation from secondary school; the survey of the 2006 seniors provided information on education and employment aspirations and the factors influencing those aspirations.

## Findings

### **Demands for Education and Employment**

Our employer interviews and data from Qatar's Planning Council indicate that demands for men are in the professional, technical, and sales and service occupations and that women are more likely to find employment in clerical jobs and in professional jobs within the government. Overall, the pattern of occupational demand favors individuals with some post-secondary education supplemented with more-specific job training.

Survey data from our study align with Qatar's 2004 census data in indicating that patterns of education and employment among Qataris are somewhat misaligned with demand. This is especially true for males: Qatari men continue to pursue careers in fields other than those in demand—most notably the military and police—and a majority of the male students surveyed aspire to these professions. As for Qatari females, a high proportion are in the teaching profession, about 15 percent of the Qatari women surveyed hold professional jobs, and a high proportion of the female students surveyed aspire to be managers or professionals rather than teachers. Women's opportunities appear to be expanding, but cultural expectations may still work against women's employment in some fields.

The trend for Qatari females to pursue and achieve a post-secondary education in greater proportions than Qatari men will likely continue given that twice as many female students as male stu-

dents indicated that they plan to attend a university or obtain a post-secondary diploma.

While government policy aims to increase Qataris' employment in the growing private sector, the trend for Qataris to work for or seek work in the government or government enterprises will likely continue.

Employers showed a high demand for people skilled in certain areas, especially English, information and communication technology (ICT), and business. They also value the so-called soft skills, such as a good work attitude and a willingness to learn. By and large, employers indicated dissatisfaction with the skills of secondary school and university graduates; they also pointed out several shortcomings of Qataris compared with expatriate workers with respect to attitudes toward work.

We found that many factors influence education and employment choices and aspirations, and that these factors often vary for males versus females and for older versus younger people. For example, in making post-secondary education and career choices, students are highly influenced by parents and religious beliefs. While our findings about these factors are in no way conclusive, they do provide important insights for policymakers.

### **Qataris Who Do Not Pursue Post-Secondary Study**

Even though economic demands in Qatar favor individuals with post-secondary education and training, a majority of Qataris do not pursue post-secondary studies. What might induce more Qataris, especially Qatari males, to do so? To isolate factors that might underlie the decision to pursue an education at the post-secondary level, we used census data and data from our surveys to compare the characteristics and experiences of Qataris who had decided to pursue a post-secondary education with those of Qataris who had decided not to.

Our survey results highlight several factors involved in this complex decision. These findings are somewhat speculative, however, because the sample sizes in some of the comparisons were small. With this caveat, we can state that the most common reasons for not pursuing a post-secondary education are ineligibility for a scholarship and

family responsibilities. Because scholarships are attached to grades in Qatar, what this effectively means is that a student's poor performance in secondary school is a significant barrier to further study. For these individuals, opportunities for remedial education may have appeal and may be of benefit for bringing more students into post-secondary education.

Workers without a post-secondary education viewed additional training in English and, to a lesser extent, basic computer skills as helpful for either advancing in their current job or getting a better job in the future. These views align with the skill demands indicated by employers.

Secondary school seniors who do not plan to pursue post-secondary studies are more likely to want to work in a government ministry and less likely to go on to work in a government-owned or privately owned company than are those who intend to continue their studies. This suggests that the availability of secure, prestigious, and well-paying government jobs that do not require post-secondary schooling may act as a disincentive to pursuing further education, especially for Qatari males. In this case, changes in educational opportunities alone may not be sufficient for altering the patterns of those choosing not to pursue post-secondary studies.

### **Adequacy of Post-Secondary Education and Training Offerings**

Our analysis of the opportunities available in Qatar for post-secondary education in high-demand fields indicated that there are numerous relevant offerings at the certificate/diploma level and undergraduate-degree level. It also indicated that there are very few offerings at the graduate level in any field. However, Qatar's Higher Education Institute offers numerous scholarship opportunities for students of different abilities who want to study abroad, where such offerings are available, and some of these scholarships target preparation for high-demand occupations.

One part of our review identified a large number of organizations in Qatar that provide training, including training in specific skills highly valued in the labor market, such as English and ICT. The opportunities for this type of training thus seem plentiful, although

our study did not attempt to assess the quality of the training being offered.

We found that the post-secondary offerings in Qatar provide good coverage of high-demand fields at some levels but that there were notable gaps:

- Opportunities for students who need remedial academic course work are limited.
- High-quality degree choices in Qatar are limited.
- Opportunities to study for a master's degree are limited.

These gaps have different effects on men and women, on recent secondary school graduates and those who have been out of school awhile, and on students considered and not considered highly able.

### **Options for Post-Secondary Investment and Our Recommendations**

For each gap in Qatar's educational offerings, we outlined the conceptual costs and benefits of three post-secondary investment options of interest to the SEC: (1) restructure programs at Qatar University, (2) recruit new foreign institutions to Qatar, and (3) develop new government-sponsored programs of less than four years.

Based on our study, we recommend that Qatari leadership consider the following investments for the three gaps in its post-secondary offerings:

- Gap: Limited opportunities for remedial course work prior to university study
  - Option: Establish a government-sponsored community college

*Addressing this gap will benefit remedial and adult students.*

- Gap: Limited four-year degree choices for high-achieving students in Qatar beyond the Education City offerings
  - Option: Recruit a top liberal arts college to Education City
  - Option: Develop an honors program at Qatar University

*Addressing this gap will benefit high-achieving students.*

- Gap: Lack of master's degrees in career-related fields in Qatar
  - Option: Expand offerings of current Education City campuses to include master's degrees in career-related fields
  - Option: Restructure Qatar University programs to begin offering more master's degrees in career-related fields

*Addressing this gap will benefit high-achieving students.*

We also recommend that a financial-aid program for adults be developed to help finance their post-secondary education and training.

Another recommendation is that Qatari decisionmakers not invest in any of these areas without first prioritizing the post-secondary gaps according to their importance to the economy and society. The issues to consider here include the extent to which an option addresses areas of national significance in terms of furthering Qatar's economic and social goals, the number and type of individuals who will benefit from investment in an option, and the trade-offs between study in Qatar and study abroad. For example, providing high-quality graduate training in Qatar will go a long way toward developing future leaders for the country, particularly women.

In addition, we recommend that the SEC conduct further feasibility studies to determine in detail what is involved in investing in the areas of highest priority. It will also be necessary to estimate the demand for post-secondary education related to each option.

We further recommend that a national campaign be conducted to raise awareness of the importance of higher education and the occupational areas that will aid economic development. This campaign should be directed both at parents, because they have much influence over their children's education and career choices, and at adults that might want to resume their schooling, upgrade their English or ICT skills, or further educate themselves as a way to advance in their current job or expand their employment opportunities.

In going forward with these recommendations, it is crucial that a long-term, overarching strategy of investment be developed for post-secondary education in Qatar, one that coordinates the various educa-

tional institutions and considers related policy areas, especially those of employment and labor. At present, Qataris continue to pursue traditional occupational pathways in government ministries despite the availability of ample opportunities for post-secondary education and training in high-demand occupations. While the factors that influence people's education and career choices are complex, it is clear that these decisions are to some degree influenced by Qatar's employment policies and customs—for example, the virtual guarantee that Qatari men with no more than a secondary school education will find secure, well-paying, and prestigious jobs in Qatar's government ministries. Another influencing factor may be the limited educational and employment opportunities that exist for women. Any post-secondary investment strategy needs to be framed within a larger context that takes these factors into consideration. Only in this way will policymakers be able to understand the range of incentives likely to be influencing individual choices and thus be able to make the best investments for future generations of Qataris.