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Identifying Priorities for Post-Secondary Education in Qatar

Like the governments of many other countries, Qatar’s government views education as a crucial element in the nation’s economic, social, and political development. Developing a strong educational system is especially important in Qatar because the Qatari population is small and the country aims to reduce its dependence on expatriate workers. In recent years, Qatar has begun reforms at all levels of its education system. The goals are to maximize the human capital of Qatari nationals and ensure that Qatar’s citizens can contribute fully to society, both economically and socially. Although Qatar has already taken steps to improve post-secondary educational opportunities—for example, by establishing a number of world-class universities in Doha’s Education City—the country’s efforts have not undergone a broad strategic review.

To understand the extent to which existing post-secondary educational offerings can meet the country’s future needs, Qatar’s Supreme Education Council (SEC) asked RAND to analyze the current situation and help identify priorities for developing post-secondary educational opportunities, either in Qatar or abroad. To answer the SEC’s questions, RAND researchers drew from institutional data, surveys of secondary school seniors and recent graduates, and interviews of employers and other education stakeholders. They found that education and employment preferences are not well aligned with demand and that the existing post-secondary offerings do not meet all of the country’s needs. To address these needs, RAND identified gaps in Qatar’s educational offerings and ways to close them.

Qataris’ Career Preferences Are Not Well Aligned with Demand

Through employer interviews and census data analysis, the researchers found that the pattern of occupational demand favors individuals with some post-secondary education supplemented with more specific job training. Demands for men are in the professional, technical, and sales

Abstract

Although Qatar has improved its post-secondary educational opportunities, the country’s efforts have not undergone a broad strategic review. This study analyzed the extent to which the current offerings can meet the country’s future needs and identified priorities for developing further educational options. Researchers found that Qataris’ current educational and employment choices do not fully align with labor demand and that the current educational options do not cover all needed skills. They recommend several options to address the gaps in Qatar’s post-secondary educational offerings.

and service occupations, while demands for women are in clerical jobs, teaching, and professional jobs within the government. Employers show a high demand for people skilled in certain areas, especially English, information and communication technology, and business. They also value “soft skills,” such as good work attitudes and a willingness to learn, and they pointed out that many Qataris fall short in these areas.

Many Qatari males and females continue to pursue education in fields other than those with job market demand. A majority of male secondary school seniors who were surveyed aspire to careers with the military and police, despite higher demand for men in professional, technical, and sales and service careers. Most opportunities for women are in clerical jobs, professional positions with the government, and teaching. A high proportion of 1998 female secondary school graduates entered the teaching profession, a traditional occupation for Qatari women. However, a majority of the current female secondary school seniors surveyed aspire to be managers or professionals. And twice as many female students as male students plan to attend a university or obtain a post-secondary diploma. Therefore, it is likely that there will be more women than men

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with university degrees, even though there are fewer employment options for women in some high-demand occupations. Women's opportunities appear to be growing, but cultural expectations might still work against their employment in some fields.

Most Qataris Do Not Pursue Post-Secondary Schooling

Even though economic demands in Qatar favor individuals with post-secondary education and training, a majority of Qataris do not pursue such studies. Several factors influence individuals' choices. The most common reasons cited by secondary school seniors for not pursuing a post-secondary education are ineligibility for a scholarship and family responsibilities. Another factor that encourages secondary school seniors, especially males, to bypass further education is the availability of secure, prestigious, and well-paying government jobs that do not require post-secondary schooling.

Qatar's Post-Secondary Offerings Cover Only Some of the Needed Skills

For high-demand fields, Qatar has numerous relevant offerings at the certificate/diploma level and undergraduate-degree level. There are also many organizations that provide training in highly valued skills. However, there are very few offerings at the graduate level in any field. Qatar's Higher Education Institute offers numerous scholarship opportunities for students who want to study abroad, and some of these scholarships target preparation for high-demand occupations.

Although there is good coverage of high-demand fields at some levels, there are also important gaps that affect Qataris' ability to meet the country's labor demands: first, the limited opportunities for students who need further academic preparation in order to enter post-secondary studies; second, the limited choices for high-achieving students who want to pursue high-quality four-year degrees other than those currently offered in Education City; and third, the limited opportunities to pursue a master's degree in career-related fields.

Improving Post-Secondary Education for the Future

RAND recommends that Qatari policymakers consider these investments to address the gaps in existing offerings.

Establish a government-sponsored community college. This investment will address the limited opportunities for students who need additional academic preparation before pursuing post-secondary studies. It will also help adults improve general skills or prepare academically if they wish to pursue further education.

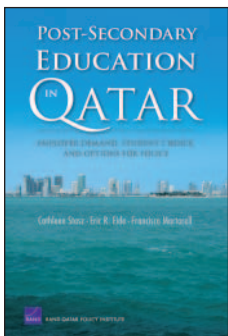
Recruit a top liberal arts college to Qatar. Doing so will provide a more diverse set of high-quality four-year degree options for all students, but especially women, some of whom do not study abroad for family reasons.

Develop an honors program at Qatar University. Qatar University offers a traditional, gender-segregated educational environment, unlike the newer institutions in Qatar's Education City. An honors program will provide high-quality education in a traditional setting, which is important for high-achieving women who prefer to study in a gender-segregated environment or who will not study abroad. The program will also provide more thorough preparation for graduate study than is currently available at Qatar University.

Add master's degrees in high-demand fields to current offerings at Education City campuses. This investment will make locally available an advanced education comparable to that at top-tier universities abroad. This will benefit students who do not wish to study abroad. It may also increase the research done in country, which could benefit Qatar's industry and economy.

Add more master's degrees in career-related fields to Qatar University programs. Offering graduate programs at Qatar University will give students the opportunity to pursue graduate-level education in a traditional setting. Like the recommended honors program, this investment is important for those who prefer a traditional, gender-segregated environment. It could also increase the country's research capacity, which would benefit Qatar's industry and economy.

RAND recommends that Qatari policymakers examine these investment options as part of the country's larger strategy for post-secondary education and long-term labor policies. These options alone might not change the patterns of post-secondary participation; policymakers must also consider how existing labor policies work against the nation's educational goals. Combined, these efforts will help Qatar develop the best educational opportunities for its future generations. ■



This research brief describes work done within RAND Education under the auspices of the RAND-Qatar Policy Institute and documented in *Post-Secondary Education in Qatar: Employer Demand, Student Choice, and Options for Policy*, by Cathleen Stasz, Eric R. Eide, and Francisco Martorell, MG-644-QATAR, 2007, 158 pp., \$23.00 (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG644/>), ISBN: 978-0-8330-4173-9. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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