Welcome and update on the Reform

Hello and welcome to the first edition of this Newsletter for the Department of Education. This edition is produced by UNRWA Education Department Headquarters and as such provides a general overview and update on the Department, particularly with regard to the Reform. The next edition will endeavor to include more contributions and feedback from Field Offices. We hope you find the newsletter useful!

At the heart of the UNRWA education reform is the changing of classroom and school practices in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The substance, systems and structures of the Education Programme will need to facilitate and support these new practices.

The last few months have served as a transitional stage in this process, whereby we have sought to lay the foundation for the Department working more strategically and responsively to the needs of the Fields. The restructuring of the HQ Education Department is therefore one dimension of the UNRWA response to this challenge. We are now working on the Education Reform Strategy. This will set the reform in context and will include detailed descriptions of each of the reform areas. The Reform areas are:

- Teacher Development & School Empowerment
- Curriculum & Quality Learning
- Partnership, Advocacy and Communications
- Inclusive Schools
- Research and Development
- Governance
- Strategic Planning and Management
- TVET, Youth and Placement

The reform Strategy will be a substantive document central to the discussion of the Retreat at the end of September 2010, and the basis for ongoing dialogue with a range of stakeholders.

This upcoming retreat will be held at the Holiday Inn at the Dead Sea from 28-30 September, 2010, and participants from across UNRWA’s five Fields of operation will contribute to supporting the finalization of the reform strategy for the Department. It is envisioned that this retreat will culminate in a consensus on how to achieve the vision of providing quality education for Palestine refugees to achieve their full potential, individually and as member of local and global community towards active and productive participation in social, political, economic, technical and cultural fields. More about the education reform process on the back page.

Caroline Pontefract
UNRWA is exploring how best it can draw upon the expertise and assistance of a range of stakeholders to support the delivery of services across the Agency. An UNRWA Policy to guide the way forward is currently under development. The importance of partnerships for education delivery is recognized within the new structure of HQ(A), as the department will now include a section on Partnerships, Communication and Advocacy.

Working within the framework of the UNRWA emerging Policy, this section will seek to identify the best options and opportunities for partnerships. Currently a number of partnerships are underway or up and running. Some specific initiatives are:

**Education Partnership Forum**

The UNRWA Education Partnership Forum took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in June 2010 initiated by Andrew Whitley, the Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York, in collaboration with the Education Department. The forum provided an opportunity for more than 45 organizations and individuals to establish, or strengthen, their links with UNRWA and Palestinian refugees. Support sub-committees have since been established for five focus areas: Advocacy and Campaigns, Teacher Education and Curriculum Enrichment, Non Traditional Ways of Learning, Special Needs Education and Psychosocial Support, After School (scholarships and vocational training). The first VCR to discuss the way forward will be held on the 20th of October 2010.

**6000 laptops for the children in Gaza and West Bank**

Ten years ago, one could only dream about every school in Gaza having a computer. But in April 2010, 5,000 children in UNRWA Gaza schools were provided with a laptop through the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) initiative. Similarly, 1000 children in West Bank also benefited from the generous donation of OLPC.

OLPC is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help provide every child in the world access to a modern education. The distribution of XO laptops in UNRWA schools is fundamental to OLPC’s mission to give connected, power-efficient and robust laptops to children around the world, especially those who have been displaced by conflict or those living in extreme poverty.

The Education Department HQ(A) initiated the partnership with OLPC in January 2009 and they have been working closely on the development of localized software and content for the XOs and on teacher training. More than 150 electronic learning modules are currently being adapted for use on the XO. OLPC and UNRWA are also collaborating on the formatting of electronic textbooks and workbooks for an entire primary school curriculum.

After the donation of laptops for Gaza and West Bank, OLPC Chairman and CEO Mr. Negroponte announced that his foundation will make all efforts to provide a laptop to every Palestine refugee child during the coming two years.

**Al Jazeera Taalam TV, free access to electronic library**

Talaam TV, the electronic education library developed by Al Jazeera Channel for Children and Baraem TV, will very soon be another learning resource for UNRWA schools.

The education Department is working to finalize the partnership agreement that will enable the students and teachers of UNRWA to benefit from the Al Jazeera Taalam TV electronic education library, free of charge. In addition, UNRWA will have the opportunity to work with Taalam.TV in digitizing UNRWA’s educational video programmes.
During the academic year 2009/2010, 114 students were selected to benefit from scholarships for tertiary education through UNRWA. This year, 421 have already graduated with 388 are currently pursuing their university studies.

The scholarships support students who excel academically, but are unable to afford tertiary education because of their difficult socio-economic circumstances. These financial barriers limit their access to higher education and subsequent employment opportunities.

A review of the programme is currently being undertaken by the Office for the Inspector General (OIG) to assess the impact of the programme in UNRWA’s schools. During September and October, the review team will be traveling to UNRWA Fields, meeting with staff and students in order to assess the impact of the programme. It is expected that the draft report of the review will be available for comment in November.

The review of the HRCRT programme provides UNRWA Education with an important opportunity to reflect on the activities of the last ten years and to consider ways in which the programme can be enriched and further developed.

Investing in the future: scholarships for Palestine refugees

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Since 2000, with the assistance of funding provided by the United States government, UNRWA has been implementing an innovative programme aimed at promoting student awareness of human and child rights. The Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance Education (HRCRT) programme also aims to support their personal and social development through the establishment of student parliaments in schools, whereby students can take on leadership roles and develop self-confidence.

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Since 1955, the Agency has provided university scholarships to 5,544 Palestine Refugees across the five Fields of operation. Many of the graduates currently hold important positions in UNRWA and internationally, including in the Gulf States, and are substantially contributing to the social and economic development of the region.

UNRWA believes that supporting these students is vital for the advancement of the Palestinian community in the medium to long term. For this reason, the Education Department will continue to forge ahead in providing scholarships to Palestinian youth.

Refreshing skills with the Summer Courses

In June and July, the Institute of Education HQ carried out the Summer Training Courses for 735 Teachers and Head Teachers from all five Fields of operation.

Courses delivered included: Qualification Courses for newly recruited teachers, Leadership Training, Continuous and Professional Development Courses. There were also workshops on key areas, such as Health, Library, Human Rights and Guidance & Counseling.

Reflecting the reform strategy and enhancing decentralization, Fields will have greater responsibility of delivery of these courses next year. It is intended that new distance multimedia learning courses will be developed by HQ and Fields to support the ongoing professional development of UNRWA teachers and support staff.
UNRWA and the Hoping Foundation are launching an online Yearbook. The Yearbook connects school leavers, by providing them with the opportunity to exchange stories, share ideas and build friendships. A flip camera has been provided to each school and each student is asked to record a short video message about their interests, hopes and dreams. Tens of thousands of these videos have been uploaded and can be accessed through computers provided to every UNRWA Preparatory school.

Students can watch their own videos, videos of their classmates, and the videos of students in other UNRWA schools. The site is secure and accessible only to the schools and students. To protect privacy, and at the request of the community, there are also separate sites for girls and boys.

It is planned that the Hoping/UNRWA facility will be used for other curriculum based activities, like sharing perceptions or views with regard to the human rights and tolerance (HRCT programme), and also for continuing informal communication and sharing.

World Teachers’ Day

World Teachers’ Day (5 of October 2010) is led at the global level by UNESCO in collaboration with ILO, UNDP, UNICEF and Education International. Every year, reflecting a specific theme, a message is released by the Director General of UNESCO in the five languages of the UN. Posters are similarly produced and circulated around the world. HQ(A) will be linking up with the fields on how best to celebrate World Teachers’ Day across UNRWA.

This year, UNRWA will join in the celebrations. The overall theme is “Recovery Begins with Teachers”. To this effect the stories of some teachers from Gaza and West Bank will be captured on DVD.
Smoke-free UNRWA

The life of Mohamed Said, a 10th grade student at one of UNRWA schools in Jordan, changed dramatically after participating in the Tobacco Control Programme (TCP) implemented last May. Mohammed started smoking when he was 11 years old because of peer pressure, but recently he learned about the negative consequences of smoking and decided to ask his school counselor for help to quit this unhealthy habit. Mohammad began 11th grade as a non-smoker.

The Education Department in coordination with the Health Department HQ(A) developed a Tobacco Control Programme (TCP) which was implemented amongst grade 5 students (and above) in May 2010 in all five UNRWA Fields of operation.

The TCP was designed and implemented in response to the results of two studies carried out by UNRWA Education /Health programmes in cooperation with the World Health Organization / Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USA. The studies revealed a high prevalence of smoking amongst students and school personnel in UNRWA schools, and emphasized the urgent need for action. The aim of the TCP programme was to raise awareness, change attitudes and offer help to students and school staff to give up smoking.

A package of educational materials was prepared and distributed to all schools. The package included: a booklet entitled “Smoking: this Killer Epidemic” an Anti-Smoking Code of Conduct in Arabic and English, Anti-Smoking Posters and stickers and Anti-Smoking Multimedia Materials. Appropriate School Supervisor training was carried out to support the best use of the materials.

Feedback from the Fields is that a wide range of activities have been implemented in different schools. These included group discussions, anti-smoking drawing contests, role play and sketches, lectures for students and parents about the negative effects of smoking (including real-life testimonies), educational games, anti-smoking videos and creative writing contests.

Andaleeb Kandah, Health Education Specialist in HQ(A), says “I am very happy for the impact that the Programme has had on changing the attitude of our students against smoking. We are looking forward to more support on the part of all UNRWA staff, especially the smokers, to continue promoting healthy habits for our students”

Education Management Information System (EMIS): An Agency approach

There is a recognized need across the Agency for a harmonized approach to Education data collection and analysis to support policy, decision making and quality education. An effective Education Management Information System (EMIS) will help to facilitate evidence-based policy and decision-making at Field and Agency wide levels.

To this effect the Department of Education, working with PCSU (David de Bold), established an EMIS Taskforce that includes representatives from each Field Office and the Education Department in HQ(A). Currently, the EMIS Taskforce is in a preliminary phase, working with UNESCO colleagues and others, to determine the scope of the EMIS. To date, monthly VCR meetings have taken place and a provisional set of guidelines is expected by the end of

Central to the education reform is informed decision making. This could be with regard to the type of training teachers need, planning appropriate programmes to discourage children from dropping out of school, or putting in place systems to help children with Special Needs.

Dr. Aidan Mulkeen, formerly at the World Bank and currently at the National University of Ireland, worked in Amman with Education staff in HQ and Fields to determine a research agenda. The potential areas of research identified include: trends and impacts on teaching and learning, teacher quality, gender, learning achievement and youth and employment.
In line with the organisational Development initiative adopted by UNRWA to deliver better services to the Palestine refugees, and in conjunction with the educational reform policy, a new system for assessing the performance of teachers in UNRWA schools in the five fields against professional competences has been developed.

This summer, 241 educational supervisors and head teachers in Jordan Field and 200 educational supervisors and head teachers in Syria Field were trained on the implementation of the new system. It is planned that training will take place in Lebanon and West Bank during September and October of this year. The system will then be implemented on a pilot basis, during this scholastic year in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the West Bank fields. This system has already been implemented in Gaza on a pilot basis during the scholastic year 2008/2009.

This project was the result of close collaboration between the Human Resources Department, the Department of Education and Fields.

The Performance Management System (PMS) is a key dimension of enhancing educational quality, while supporting professional development. It is intended that the system will be further developed to encompass Head Teachers and other professional education support staff in future.

“At home in Class” with the Generalist teacher approach

Ahmad is one of the Palestinian students in Jofeh Elementary Boys school in Jordan who, when moving from Grade 3 to Grade 4, found it difficult adjusting to having seven subject teachers every week rather than one class teacher. He found that there was not enough time in the lessons for the different teachers to get to know him and his strengths and weaknesses in the same way that his class teacher had the year before. This meant they sometimes got annoyed with him thinking he had not completed his work because of laziness, when really it was because he had not understood.

This is why the Education Department decided to undertake research to find out more about the two different types of school organization approaches, Generalist Teacher and Specialist Teacher. The study is looking at the benefits and drawbacks of extending the placement of the Generalist Teacher model after grade 3. Educational models from other countries are being explored and the logistical implications of moving from Generalist to Specialist in at least Grade 4 will be considered.

Findings indicate that the Generalist model provision of a “Home classroom” promotes learning which is personalized and adapted to the specific needs of the child. Additionally, this strengthens the teacher’s ability to identify students with special psycho-social needs. It also provides teachers with the flexibility to allocate time and resources according to the interest and difficulty of the topic. A stronger group spirit and cohesion is developed within the class, which further supports children’s personal and psycho-social development.

A Policy Brief will be developed and circulated, and discussions with the Fields will be held to determine how to best respond to the research findings.
Testing times!

In May 2009 the Department of Education undertook the largest cross-Field student achievement survey of UNRWA's 60 year history, the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA). The MLA provides a measure of how well the UNRWA education system is functioning. Information on the performance of 60,000 Grade 4 and 8 students in Mathematics and Arabic across UNRWA's five Fields was generated. In addition to this, 7,000 students and 2,000 teachers completed questionnaires on teaching and learning practices and students’ attitudes to school and learning.

The draft report on the MLA findings was released in April 2010, providing detailed information on student performance in each Field. Some of the key findings of the MLA include:

- Performance was similar across fields; though, in each field, there are significant differences between the performance of individual schools;
- The overall performance of boys was noticeably lower than that of girls;
- In both Arabic and Mathematics results suggested that some percentage of students had not fully mastered foundational concepts needed to progress;

The findings of the 2009 MLA survey will serve as a baseline against which future progress can be tracked. However, more importantly it is an indication of the quality of teaching and learning practices across UNRWA. In this way it reflects the findings of the Universalia Review of the Education Programme, which highlights the need to fundamentally change what goes on in the classroom.

The success of the MLA was due to the combined efforts of all Education staff and this reflects their ongoing commitment to supporting UNRWA students.

TVET more responsive than ever

Since its establishment in 1953, the aim of UNRWA Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been to prepare qualified graduates for employment opportunities in the local and regional labour markets. Currently, the vocational and technical training centers in UNRWA’s five Fields of operation offer courses at secondary and post-secondary levels, with more than 6600 trainees enrolled in the last academic year of 2009/2010.

In response to changing markets and technologies, UNRWA TVET programme is working with partners to increase relevance and accessibility of TVET courses. For example, the Competency-Based Training (CBT) approach provides greater opportunities for Palestine Refugee youth from vulnerable groups to gain employment opportunities. The CBT is a new method that addresses the specific competencies required in the labour market.

With the support of InWEnt Capacity Building International, an organization based in Germany, a number of UNRWA staff has undergone intensive trainings to enable their staff to drive the new vision for TVET. For example, staff participated in courses on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability, in order to help TVET ensure its viability in promoting income generating activities and optimizing resources. Another focus of interest was Quality Management for TVET. In the last 6 months, 24 staff from TVET at HQ(A) and from the Field Offices have benefitted from the training workshops organized by InWEnt.
Thousands of Palestinian students have participated in UNRWA’s free “Regular Training Program” since the establishment of UNRWA in 1949. The programme is open to Palestine refugee students who have finished the last year of High School and the focus is on technical and trade courses which are aligned with the current needs of the labour market. These courses are offered at UNRWA training centers - namely pre-service teacher training- in partnership with the Faculties of Educational Sciences.

The success of this program, and the increasing demand for places, encouraged the UNRWA Education Programme in Jordan Field to introduce a Parallel Education System. This is a fee-based programme which offers the same courses to any student at a small fee in order to facilitate greater access.

An Educational Technical Instruction (ETI) is in its final stage of development before being circulated to the Fields for discussion. The ETI will further facilitate this innovative approach to extend access through income generation while ensuring fees are accounted for and effectively utilized.

The upcoming retreat is the third held in focusing on UNRWA education reforms, and will build upon the significant work of the previous two retreats.

On 10 and 11 May 2010 a two-day workshop was hosted by the Department of Education to discuss and develop a common understanding of quality education in relation to UNRWA. This was a crucial initial stage in order to agree on a common vision to guide and direct all future activities. The workshop was attended by participants drawn from Field Education Programmes and HQ-Amman in addition to representatives from UNESCO (regional and Ramallah office) and international consultants.

The second workshop of the 1-3 June 2010 used the definition and vision of quality education articulated in the first retreat, as a springboard for 3 days of discussion on priorities, systems and structures of the UNRWA Education Programme. The workshop was attended by participants from all the five UNRWA Field offices and by Education Department and PCSU representatives.

The reports for both workshops have been distributed amongst participants and relevant Agency stakeholders and should serve as useful documents in their own right and as context and background for the third retreat.