What are the key drivers behind the reform? Amongst some stakeholders, there are perceptions of declining quality. A recent independent assessment of the education programme (Universalia) emphasised the need for reform and for UNRWA to put in place a stronger, unified approach.

However, the success of the education programme over 60 years must serve as the springboard for any reform. A fresh look was taken at what was happening in UNRWA education, in the region, and across the globe. The starting point was defining quality education for Palestine refugees, and how to ensure that no UNRWA child is left behind.

The Education Reform Strategy sets out a comprehensive interrelated programme of action. Optimal benefits and sustainable impact will be achieved through this approach which ensures students are at the centre of the system, teachers are supported, schools are empowered, and the whole UNRWA education system is strengthened.
Investing in Teachers: Teacher Education and Development Policy

Teachers are UNRWA’s single most important educational resource; central to the provision of quality education. The Teacher Education and Development Policy builds on international research and responds to the Universalia evaluation of UNRWA education, which stressed the importance of having a strategic teaching policy and framework in place. It encompasses teacher recruitment and training, professional development and support, diversified and motivating career opportunities, professional accountability and quality assurance, and school empowerment. The Teacher Education and Development Policy aims to support and motivate teachers as valued professionals, preparing motivating, and supporting teachers to deliver the highest quality education.

School Based Teacher Development (SBTD): Transforming Classroom Practices

Teachers are at the heart of UNRWA’s Education Reform. A school based programme of continuous professional development for teachers is being introduced in 2012, recognising not only the importance of teacher training but also reflecting best practice about how people learn and how teachers develop professionally.

The SBTD programme adopts a blended learning approach, in which teachers study and interact with a range of distance-learning materials and try out new ways of working in their classrooms. The SBTD programme aims to do more than change the way teachers teach; it seeks to strengthen UNRWA’s system of professional support for teachers, through empowering Head Teachers and Education Specialists to actively support teachers in their study.

School Based Principal Development (SBPD): Leading for the Future

Global research evidence shows that school leadership is a key factor in the quality of education a school provides. The UNRWA Reform Strategy requires competent and confident leadership at school level in order to drive improvement and reach the Agency goal of providing high quality education for all pupils in UNRWA schools. Building on Head Teachers’ and Principals’ existing knowledge of leading and managing people, School Based Principal Development (SBPD): Leading for the Future will accelerate the acquisition of practical skills, tools and techniques towards effective, efficient and equitable education.
Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an approach that changes attitudes, school and classroom practices and the entire education system to meet the needs of all students regardless of gender, abilities, disabilities, socio-economic status, health and psychosocial needs. This will be achieved through: Promoting child friendly, healthy, safe and stimulating school environments; Empowering teachers to identify and respond to diverse needs of students; Strengthening school based support for students with additional needs; Developing referral and support systems to better respond to extensive needs.

Inclusive education is a philosophy which underpins the whole education reform and also is a set of actions and practices and teaching methods which teachers can employ with their pupils. Inclusive education does not refer only to children with special needs or to remedial education, but rather it is an approach that aims to meet the learning, psychosocial and health needs of all children.

Teachers’ capacity will be built to use strategies and approaches for learning which is inclusive of all children. Where particular children need some additional or more extensive support, there will be robust mechanisms to identify their needs and support the children in the varying contexts of the Fields. Through inclusive education, all children will be given equal opportunity to fulfil their potential, ensuring that no child is left behind, and respecting the rights and diverse learning needs of all children.

Human Rights, Conflict Resolution, and Tolerance Education

UNRWA has been teaching Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) in its schools for many years. Guided by a new HRCRT policy, UNRWA’s teaching in these areas is being updated, building upon past successes, as well as drawing from international best practice in human rights education in schools. The HRCRT policy sets out the commitment for common objectives and outcomes for all UNRWA schools for the teaching and learning about human rights, conflict resolution, and tolerance. It is based on the successes of the current HRCRT programme and grounded in international human rights principles and standards.

Framework for Quality Analysis and Implementation of the Curriculum

UNRWA provides education in varied contexts and different host country education systems and it is important therefore to ensure that the delivery of education in its schools aligns with the broader development goals of the UNRWA education programme. UNRWA’s education programme must also reflect the values, principles and purposes of the United Nations. One of the key elements of the UNRWA education reform therefore is a system to maintain quality standards across all Fields, and the Framework for Quality Analysis and Implementation of the Curriculum will enable this.

The Framework will have several functions. Firstly it provides a policy framework for the curriculum. Secondly it is a set of criteria against which host country curricula and learning materials can be evaluated. Thirdly, it can strengthen learning experiences for students and support the enrichment of host country curricula and materials and crucially it provides a way of ensuring curriculum reflects United Nations values and UNRWA expectations. Last, but not least, the framework will also be used to support teachers’ professional development.
UNRWA provides assistance, protection and advocacy for some 5 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory, pending a solution to their plight. The Agency’s services encompass education, health care, social safety-net, camp infrastructure and improvement, community support, microfinance and emergency response, including in times of armed conflict. Through these services UNRWA strives to help Palestine refugees achieve a decent standard of living, long and healthy lives, knowledge and skills and full enjoyment of human rights. These goals are formulated according to the UN criteria for human development.