UNRWA's Teacher Policy launched

Given the crucial role of teachers in quality education, the Department of Education prioritized the development of a Teacher Policy which was launched in November 2013. From the onset the emphasis was to develop a policy, which was professionally viable, financially feasible, administratively achievable and politically acceptable.

The Teacher Policy is key to the Education Reform 2011-2015 in further professionalizing the Agency’s teaching workforce and strengthening teachers’ career progression opportunities, their professional development and teacher governance in UNRWA. Five new technical units will be established in each Field (Assessment, School Quality Assurance, Professional Development and Curriculum and Technical Support), and school level support will be provided through a pilot Teacher Coordinator post in the West Bank.

The Policy will be fully operational in this 2014-2015 Academic year. Complementary to the Teacher Policy, any anomalies in the grading of the Head Teachers and Assistant Head Teacher posts is also being addressed. This will ensure consistency across the Agency’s five Fields of operation from the beginning of 2014.

Working to support the psychosocial well-being of the Palestine Refugee children of Syria

Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the displacement of Palestine refugee (PR) children within Syria, and to neighbouring countries, is taking its toll on its children.

To address this issue, UNRWA has an Education in Emergencies response (funded by EU IFS project). As part of this, 49 dedicated Psychosocial Counsellors have been recruited to work with Palestine Refugee children in schools in Syria (41,000), Lebanon (7,500) and Jordan (1,800). The recruited counsellors have been trained by a professional Psychologist and HQ Education Specialists from Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. UNRWA’s international partners, including NRC, War Child and Right to Play, have also contributed to the workshops leading sessions on specific topics and skills.

A Psychosocial Training Manual has been developed with practical exercises for children and guidance on the psychosocial aspects of children exposed to violence, conflict loss and displacement. The training manual will equip teachers and counsellors in supporting the psychosocial well-being of children and will cover topics such as: how children react to a crisis situation, the role of teachers in promoting well-being to its pupils, how to manage challenging behaviour and maintain a positive discipline, or how to discuss the crisis with children.
Regular follow-up sessions, coaching and support for the counsellors will be provided in each of UNRWA Fields. A UNRWA Psychosocial Support Group has also been established to enable those providing support to discuss issues among themselves.

**Making a difference: the UNRWA Curriculum Framework**

The UNRWA Curriculum Framework is making a positive difference in UNRWA schools. UNRWA follows the curricula of the respective host country/authority and the Curriculum Framework will enable each Field to analyze and enrich host country curricula, textbooks and other learning materials. This enrichment will also help to ensure that curricular and teaching practices reflect UNRWA values and principles as a UN organization.

The framework serves as a policy reference document, an evaluation tool, a framework for analysis and a tool for professional development aiming to ensure that quality standards are integrated across the Agency.

The analysis tools will be used at both Field and School level. At Field Level, Technical Committees will use the tools to analyze host country textbooks and other learning materials. At school level, the School Analysis Tool will enable teachers to assess the extent in which lessons contribute to the development of those competencies and values. Workshops to further support Education Specialists in implementing the Curriculum Framework in their Fields were held in UNRWA five Fields of operation during November and December 2013.

**Poster competition empowers UNRWA students to advocate for human rights**

Early last year UNRWA held a Human Rights Poster Design competition, challenging students across its’ five Fields of Operation to answer the question, “What does ‘human rights’ mean to you?” through a drawing. The panel of judges was particularly impressed by the powerful message on gender equality in the drawing of 16 year-old Shuruk Sa’adi.

In a ceremony held at Marka Third Preparatory Girls School, UNRWA Director of Education, Dr. Caroline Pontefract, and Chief of the Education Programme in Jordan, Jihad Hamdan, congratulated Shuruk for pursuing her creative talents. Dr. Pontefract said “I felt very inspired and impressed to see Shuruk’s confidence and skills. Shuruk upholds human rights values and feels a responsibility to advocate for human rights, and that’s what our HRCRT Programme is all about –empowering our students to realise their full potential in this regard”

Shuruk strengthened her human rights knowledge, attitudes, and skills through her engagement in UNRWA’s Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) Education Programme.

A HRCRT Toolkit, which was launched in June 2013, will further mainstream HRCRT education and introduce teaching practices that promote and reflect human rights in the classroom. With the printing of the Toolkit finalized, teacher training is scheduled to take place time in the coming months. The PRM-funded Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) education program in UNRWA schools empowers young Palestine
refugees by encouraging them to enjoy and exercise their rights, uphold the rights of others, be proud of their Palestinian identity and contribute positively to their society.

10 years of UNRWA active participation in the Cisco Networking Academy programme

Congratulations! UNRWA Education ICT Unit has completed 10 years of active participation and service in the Cisco Networking Academy programme.

Aiming to build the capacity of Palestinian refugee’s youth and women in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), UNRWA, in partnership with Cisco Systems, established the first generation of Cisco Networking Academies in December 2001. The launch of the first Wadi Seer Training Center Cisco Regional Networking Academy marked the beginning of other 9 consecutives Networking Academies integrated in the Technical and Vocational centres of UNRWA five Fields.

After these 10 years, UNRWA and Cisco Networking Academies have become a flagship programme in the ICT education arena. More than 450 Palestine refugee students, with a 35% of female participation have been trained to design, build, troubleshoot and secure computer networks every year. Through high quality online courses, interactive tools and hands-on learning activities about 3000 Palestine refugee students have been graduated and pursued industry-standard certifications. This is undoubtedly helping Palestine refugee youth to increase their career opportunities in the regional and worldwide labour market.

Within the next several months the Wadi Seer Training Center Cisco Regional Networking Academy, will receive a customized wall plaque and a Years of Service icon will be added to the academy’s name on the Cisco NetSpace Recognition Program website.

Raising UNRWA education staff awareness of Inclusive Education

Aiming to raise UNRWA education staff’s awareness of the Inclusive Education Policy, Strategy and the implementation standards, the Inclusive Education (IE) awareness training was held on July -September 2013 in Jordan Field.

In all, EDC, 172 school Head Teachers and education staff from the four Amman Areas came to better understand the IE Policy as a way to establish principles and a unified approach for inclusive education in UNRWA schools, about the gradual progressive steps for IE implementation and learn more about IE Strategy.

The UNRWA Inclusive Education Policy plays a crucial role in ensuring there is a shared understanding and commitment to inclusive education. The Toolkit and its supporting documents: Inclusive Education Policy, Strategy, Fact sheet, Policy Brief, training manual and a DVD will further serve to provide a framework for UNRWA approach to teaching and learning of all Palestine refugee children. As part of the DIAKONIA/NAD project, the Inclusive Education Unit held a Toolkit
Training of Trainer session in October 2013 for Education Specialists, Head Teachers and School Counselors of Jordan Field. All participants received the Toolkit, which consists of a user-Friendly teacher Guide and 19 tools to help teachers identify students’ needs and disabilities. The workshop was a success with the attendees expressing their appreciation of the value of the toolkit to UNRWA teachers for identifying and responding to the diverse needs of student. Participants also received the full Inclusive Education Advocacy package and DVD for their continuous reference and guidance. Following on from these sessions, the Head Teachers who attended the workshop will run the same for the teachers in their schools.

The Inclusive Education Teacher’s Toolkit for identifying and responding to student’s diverse learning, health and psychosocial needs has been finalized thanks to this active engagement of UNRWA educational staff in the five Fields. The completed Toolkit will support teachers and education staff in identifying and responding to the diverse needs of students at UNRWA’s schools.

UNRWA launches the first TVET e-learning portal for Palestine refugees in SAR

In response to the prevailing situation in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) and with the number of Palestine refugee trainees forced to discontinue their attendance at the Damascus Training Center (DTC), the TVET&Youth Unit has developed an e-learning portal hosted under the main TVET platform of the German International Cooperation (GIZ): www.tvet-portal.net

The UNRWA e-learning initiative began on the first semester this year, is currently enabling a large number of Palestine refugee vulnerable groups to continue their academic plan in spite of the conflict circumstances. The e-learning materials can be easily downloaded by the DTC trainees and used as self-learning tools to help them continue their studies. Online accounts have been created for around 100 instructors and professional course students to enable ongoing online assessment and quality guidance. Trainees will also have the opportunity to conduct their academic exams, check tests results and, finally, get their academic certificates through the portal.

Further steps will be taken to replicate the e-learning approach at all UNRWA Technical Centers in 2014. This will be for both Technical and academic e-learning subjects such as Engineering, Electronics, Medical Sciences, Paramedic, English and Arabic being covered in Jordan, Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank.

GIZ has been an UNRWA partner in the e-learning since 2011 and continues to provide technical expertise in this area and also in developing the improvement in TVET strategy and in career guidance.

Leading for the Future, a continuous support to UNRWA Head Teachers

The Leading for the Future (LftF) programme is rolling out in all UNRWA Fields. The programme will enhance the leadership and motivational skills of Head Teachers and Principals in the 700 UNRWA schools.
In September, the LftF international consultant facilitated the second ‘Facilitators Capacity Building’ workshop, for Area Education Officers and Field-level Education Specialists from all the Fields. Head teachers participating in the programme attended the face to face Development Workshops and finalized their study of Module 2 with its school based assignments. The Head teachers are enthusiastic and some Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media groups have been established to share their experiences.

One Head Teacher commented “I always try to develop myself and keep updated on the latest teaching methods. I am not happy sitting still, I want to move forward, changing and improving.” Leading for the Future brings the opportunity to UNRWA Head teachers to keep up-to-date on the latest teaching methods and explore new ways of leading and working with staff.

Celebrating the commitment of UNRWA teachers on World Teachers’ Day

On the occasion of World Teachers’ Day, UNRWA HQA and JFO hosted a joint event at the Amman Training Centre, to celebrate the central role of UNRWA teachers in providing quality education to Palestine refugees, even in times of emergency. More than 150 people gathered to celebrate the day, under this year’s global UNESCO led theme ‘A call for teachers!’ Events were also held throughout all the Fields.

At the ceremony in Amman, UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General Margot Ellis highlighted the crucial role of UNRWA teachers in educating Palestine refugee children. Director of Education Dr Caroline Pontefract talked of the focus of the Reform on teachers, “Through this reform, we have worked hard to support teachers with innovative training programmes and an Agency-wide Teacher Policy, which provides greater opportunities for career progression and enhanced professionalism.”

Ms. Anna Segall, Acting Director of UNRWA Operations in Jordan, also stressed the importance of high-quality teaching, as well as continued learning, self-improvement and development for teachers themselves, to build their capacity, and, through them, that of the Agency’s education system.

Professor Jihad Hamdan, Chief of the UNRWA education programme in Jordan, emphasized the role of teachers as change agents contributing to shape the minds and the future of Palestine refugee children. A collection of World Teachers’ Day posters provided a visual celebration of UNRWA teachers and their work, and an Awards Ceremony for teachers was also held.

World Teachers’ Day was inaugurated on 5 October 1994 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to commemorate the signing, in 1966, of the UNESCO/ ILO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers. Events were held throughout the Agency’s five fields of operations.

Delivering School Based Teacher Development expertise to all UNRWA Fields

School Based Teacher Development (SBTD) is now progressing well after the external obstacles faced in the first phase of implementation. A second advocacy campaign was undertaken in the five Fields of operation and key education staff members. Re-induction sessions were also held. These served as
a refresher on the SBTD structures and components. The HQ team also sent the two first welcoming SMS to Head Teachers reaching 2,143 educationalists in UNRWA Fields. The second SMS read: “Dear Education specialist: You are about to conduct the first support session. Do your best to stimulate effective discussions, model active learning pedagogies and enrich teachers’ experience during the session”, while teachers could read: “Dear teacher: Make sure you implement all activities and practices in the first module and document what is needed in your portfolio. Share your experience, success and challenges with your colleagues.”

New scholarship opportunities in Europe for Palestine Refugees

In July 2013, UNRWA became an associated partner of Phoenix Intercultural Exchange for Internationalization network. The project, funded by the EU and coordinated by the Spanish University of Almeria, aims to create a mobility based network between students from 9 Universities of the EU and 8 Universities in Jordan, West Bank, Gaza, Syria and Lebanon. UNRWA role will be to promote and strengthen the programme’s accessibility to Palestine refugees of UNRWA five Fields of operation. Phoenix is an Erasmus Mundus programme, aiming to support undergraduates, Master and PhD, students to improve their experience and skills through interactive international environment. More information at: http://www.em-phoenix.eu

Education against the odds, a successful UNRWA Back To School campaign

To celebrate UNRWA students returning to school after summer, ERCD in coordination with the Education Department, ran a successful Back To School (BTS) awareness initiative between the 25 August and 15 September targeting external audiences, UNRWA staff, EU donors and host governments. The theme of last year’s BTS campaign was an UNRWA education for Palestine Refugees in times of emergencies. Several human interest video stories served as powerful testimonies as to the challenges and opportunities that this going back to school meant to UNRWA students. The 10-year old girl Rama talked about going back to school in Syria. Last year, Rama’s school in Syria was closed, but now she is resuming her studies at an UNRWA centre in Damascus. In the video, Rama shared an inspiring message of hope to other Palestine refugee children, stressing on the importance of keep being educated even in times of severe difficulties like the ones she was facing.

A visit by Arab Idol and Regional Youth Ambassador Mohammed Assaf to a girls’ school in the Palestine refugee camp of Am’ari, near Ramallah, helped emphasize the message of the Back to School campaign and encouraged the girls to study hard and complete their education. Thanks to the generous fund of the EU, UNRWA also produced a video clip, Story of My School, and partnered with ‘Visualizing Palestine’ NGO to produce the first Agency info-graphic on Palestine refugee children from Syria. More information at: www.unrwa.org/back2school
High Employment rate of UNRWA TVET graduates

Every year, the UNRWA Placement and Career Guidance Assistants (PCGA’s) compute and analyze the number of graduates from UNRWA nine Vocational Training Centers, the Education Sciences Faculty of the west Bank, and the Faculty of Educational Sciences & Arts in Jordan. The results of this 2012 last academic year indicated that a 70% of UNRWA TVET trainees are currently working in a job related to their training field or studying higher education related to it. Similarly with regards to men and women, a 68.91% of graduated women are working in a job related to their training.

Professional areas of Engineering, Business and Administration, Accounting, Management Information Systems and Medicine are the ones where the majority of UNRWA trainees are currently employed. The PCGS is at each Field of UNRWA operations and play an important role in the UNRWA TVET programme and its linkage with the regional labour market.

UNRWA Director of Education raises the profile of UNESCO-UNRWA historic cooperation

Upon the invitation of UNESCO, the Director of the UNRWA Education Department, Dr. Caroline Pontefract gave a presentation on the UNESCO-UNRWA cooperation at UNESCO HQ in Paris on 12 November 2013. The presentation entitled “60 years of education for Palestine refugees: UNESCO and UNRWA cooperation” was given at the “Open UNESCO” side event to the UNESCO Geneva Conference and attracted a great deal of interest. It was attended by delegates from Arab Member States to UNESCO including the Palestinian delegation, and senior UNESCO Education Sector staff were eager to learn more about this historic cooperation.

UNESCO played a key role in the establishment of the UNRWA education programme in the early 1950’s, and continued to provide technical responsibility since that time. Currently the Education Department is reviewing the agreement with UNESCO, which was last revised on 1967. During her mission to UNESCO Paris, Dr. Pontefract also attended the UNESCO Education Leadership Team Meeting. New areas of increased technical exchange within UNESCO were discussed such as Education in Emergencies and Human Rights Education were also discussed. In a final meeting with the Assistant Director General of UNESCO for Education, Dr. Qian Tang, UNESCO reiterated his continued support to the UNRWA Education Programme.

Looking at implications of the international education research

The Education Department published two new Research Briefs summarizing international research on major education topics. The first Brief focuses on class size and education quality. Here the research indicates that there are weak and inconsistent links between class size and educational achievement, and it highlights however that any decrease in class size has major implications for education budgets. The Brief thus suggests that there are other more cost effective ways of enhance education quality, particularly through the improvement of teaching and learning practices.
The second Research Brief discusses students’ grade repetition. Repetition is often used to address low achievement. However, research shows its effectiveness is very questionable: repetition can lead to short term improvement, but in the long run repeaters generally fall further behind their age-peers. Repetition also seriously affects student well-being and is linked to their higher drop-out. Alternative ways of addressing low achievement, including increased partnership with parents, earlier support for at-risk students, a quality, relevant curriculum and improved teaching practices, can help reduce repetition.

UNRWA contributes to build the future of Education at the WISE conference in Doha

UNRWA was represented at the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) in Doha (October 29 – 31) by the Commissioner General.

At a key panel session with higher level representatives from UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR and her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser UNESCO’s Special Envoy for Education, UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi signed the Education Above All agreement to provide emergency education to Palestine refugee children affected by the conflict in Syria.

Education Above All Foundation (EAA) is a global initiative of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser and its programme, Educate A Child (EAC), serves as catalyst for concerted action amongst global partners to prevent attacks against education. The agreement between UNRWA and EAC will provide emergency education support to over 67,000 Palestine refugee children from Syria, including those who remain in Syria as well as those who have fled to Jordan and Lebanon.

During the summit, Mr. Filippo Grandi highlighted that “The Agency’s delivery of education to the overwhelming majority of Palestine refugee children in Syria has been severely impaired.” and added, “Thanks to this contribution from EAC, led by Her Highness Sheikha Moza, UNRWA can now offer more emergency education and help mitigate the long-term impact of the armed conflict on these children”.

UNRWA Education Department was also represented on panels and in technical meetings by Director of Education, Dr. Pontefract. Also UNRWA’s Human Rights Education Programme Coordinator presented the HRCRT Programme at a specific technical meeting on “Conflict Sensitive Education” organized by UNESCO and Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC). UNRWA’s approach to human rights education received interest and positive feedback from the participants. Subsequently, the organizers invited UNRWA to be a part of a technical group providing input to the UNESCO / PEIC resource guide on conflict sensitive education.

The exhibition of UNRWA’s Education Reform products also received a lot of interest from participants from around the world. The summit presented a good opportunity to build new partnerships and present UNRWA’s work in the area of education.