

# Redesigning Qatar's Post-Secondary Scholarship System

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Since 1995, Qatar's leadership has taken steps to ensure that the country's system of higher education would be responsive to the country's evolving needs. Toward that end, in 2003, Qatar's Supreme Education Council (SEC) asked RAND to recommend improvements to its national scholarship system, which was established to award grants to citizens studying abroad in undergraduate and graduate programs.

Specifically, Qatar's leaders wanted the scholarship system to fulfill the following objectives: (1) satisfy workforce needs; (2) develop language, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills; (3) prepare future leaders; (4) provide international exposure and establish ties with other countries; and (5) meet civic and cultural goals.

RAND was asked to consider all aspects of the system, including its purpose and outcomes, as well as the processes of financing and contracting with students and the policies determining the eligibility of students and institutions.

The research team examined existing procedures, conducted interviews with more than 50 stakeholders, and reviewed selected scholarship programs around the world. Based on the study's findings, the RAND team proposed a system that would require establishing new scholarship programs and creating an institute to manage the programs and oversee other post-secondary education needs. To function effectively, this new system would be guided by the principles of quality, accountability, efficiency, flexibility, and support, as adopted by prestigious scholarship programs worldwide. The team's recommendations were submitted in 2004, and many have been implemented by the Qatari government.

## Proposed Scholarship Programs

The recommended scholarship system is centered around three major scholarship programs for undergraduate and graduate study. These programs would continue giving grants for study

## Abstract

At the request of Qatar's Supreme Education Council (SEC), RAND researchers devised a new set of scholarship programs for college-bound Qatari students and proposed the formation of an institute to manage the programs and oversee other post-secondary functions. The suggested system balanced support for local institutions of higher learning with support for students studying abroad and was designed to help Qatar meet specific post-secondary and workforce needs. Within one year, the SEC implemented most of the study's recommendations.

abroad, but they would also support students attending domestic institutions, including Qatar University and the group of international colleges with branches in Qatar's Education City. All Qatari citizens who have graduated from secondary schools would be able to receive scholarships if they were admitted to eligible post-secondary institutions.

- Prestigious scholarship program.** This program would reward exceptional academic performance at the secondary level and offer the incentive of great flexibility, giving students the choice of enrolling in any major or degree program worldwide and requiring few postgraduate obligations from those attending highly selective institutions. Eligible institutions, besides those in Education City, could include the top 50 U.S. universities, the top 10 UK universities, and the top five universities in other countries.
- Employer-sponsored program.** This program is designed to meet Qatar's workforce needs. Students sponsored by employers would need to be admitted to an institution of higher quality than Qatar University. If

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job-related degree programs are offered by schools in Education City, applicants would first have to be rejected by these schools before gaining a scholarship for study abroad.

- **Loan-based program.** This program would be an option for students who prefer not to study under contract with an employer or who are not accepted to the two other programs. Loans would be awarded to students entering a school of higher quality than Qatar University. The incentive of subsidized interest rates would be granted for study in Education City or for fields considered national priorities. The loan-based program could also be open to noncitizen residents of Qatar.

Pass rates on Qatar's secondary-school exit exam show that approximately two-thirds of the country's students are prepared to enter college and would receive a scholarship if accepted by an eligible institution. For those not adequately prepared for post-secondary study, the RAND team proposed awarding precollege grants for language study or other academic work that could make the students eligible for full scholarships or low-interest loans at a later time. Such grants would cover only tuition—not travel or living allowances—to encourage enrollment in domestic programs.

### Possible Consequences

Because the RAND team suggested taking full advantage of programs offered by domestic universities, the adoption of the new program may lead to a decline in the number of Qataris enrolling in degree programs abroad. Also, because scholarships would be awarded under stringent new guidelines, the number of scholarship recipients could fall somewhat in the short term. However, elevating award criteria should strengthen the system over time, because applicants would be motivated to excel in secondary school and gain admission to high-quality institutions.

### Proposed Organizational Structure

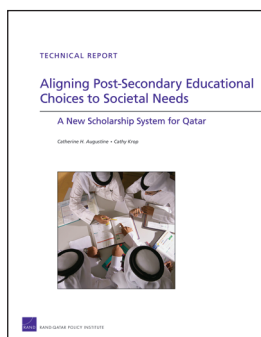
The RAND team recommended establishing a Post-Secondary Education Institute that would not only manage scholarships but also plan for and monitor Qatar's post-secondary education system. The institute would house three offices:

- An *institutional standards office* would evaluate local post-secondary institutions against foreign counterparts and provide authorization and licensing for colleges in Qatar.
- A *scholarship office* would propose policies, procedures, and scholarship guidelines. Staff would also design contracts and financial packages, ensure that recipients fulfilled obligations, and interact with employers about labor-market needs. This office would be a point of contact for recipients and alumni, hosting orientation events, providing ongoing support for students, and reviewing requests for transfers and extensions.
- A *student resource center* would offer guidance to Qataris considering post-secondary education. The center would assist with college preparation and applications and would guide prospective students toward learning programs consistent with their abilities and the nation's needs.

### Implementation

Accepting the RAND team's recommendations, the SEC established the institute, calling it the Higher Education Institute (HEI), with an organizational structure similar to the Post-Secondary Education Institute proposed by RAND. The HEI critically assessed and adopted the suggested goals and principles, along with many of the RAND team's recommendations on scholarship programs; however, the HEI has modified the proposed approach wherever it judged that such changes would make the institute and its programs more responsive to the country's needs.

The report resulting from the RAND study acknowledges that the new system will be significantly affected by the context in which it operates. Directing students into programs that meet workforce needs, for example, is complicated by the fact that the availability of government-sector jobs for Qatari nationals limits student incentives to pursue occupations that are in high demand in the private or quasi-private sectors. Additionally, women, though often more highly educated than the country's men, tend to enter a limited set of occupations. These and various other Qatari employment and labor policies and social customs may interact with the proposed reforms and modify their implementation. ■



This research brief describes work done within RAND Education under the auspices of the RAND-Qatar Policy Institute (RQPI) and documented in *Aligning Post-Secondary Educational Choices to Societal Needs: A New Scholarship System for Qatar*, by Catherine H. Augustine and Cathy Krop, TR-478-QATAR, 94 pp., \$24.50 (available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR478/](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR478/)), ISBN: 978-0-8330-4420-4. 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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