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International

# HIGHER EDUCATION IN JORDAN: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

## **Contact:**

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## **Executive summary:**

This note first provides an overview of the working environment in Jordan and its higher education system. Following this, it outlines UK-Jordan HE collaborations as well as opportunities for future engagement and potential challenges.

## **Key Action:**

University representatives with an interest in collaborating with Jordanian universities are asked to contact UUKi for further institutional and/or contact details.

## **Audience:**

Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Directors  
International and International  
Office staff with responsibility  
for the MENA region.

# INTRODUCTION

Potential for increased collaboration between the UK and Jordanian higher education sectors, especially in terms of student recruitment and research, led Universities UK International with support from British Council Jordan to organise a study visit from 17 – 18 June 2019. The delegation aimed at developing relationships, enhancing mutual understanding and identifying opportunities.

This information note presents an overview of the working environment in Jordan and its higher education system. It then outlines the current state of UK-Jordanian higher education collaboration as well as opportunities and barriers for future collaborations.

UUKi, July 2019.

# HIGHER EDUCATION IN JORDAN

## Macro Environment

Jordan has a population of 10.4 million people, with around 54% under the age of 24 years; those between 15 and 24 years present 20% of the population. The official language is Arabic, but English is widely spoken.<sup>1</sup>

## Political Context

The semi-autonomous region of Transjordan fully gained independence from Britain in 1946 and became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. In 1999, King Abdallah II assumed the throne following his father's death. Despite some modest political reforms (eg, a new electoral law in 2016), recent constitutional changes have strengthened the king's powers, while he continues to lead policymaking, foreign policy and Jordan's strategic direction and - in consultation with parliament - he also appoints the prime minister. Political parties are legal, but generally less important than the tribal or family background of politicians.<sup>2</sup>

## Economy

Not only is Jordan one of the smallest economies in the Middle East, but insufficient water supply and natural resource scarcity make the country heavily dependent on food and energy imports as well as foreign assistance. Other economic challenges for the Jordanian government include high rates of unemployment (youth unemployment was at 37.4% in 2019<sup>3</sup>), budget and current account deficits, and government debt. Regional conflicts have led to an economic slowdown of 2% GDP growth in 2017 and a

refugee crisis requiring the country to manage the influx of over 700,000 refugees as of June 2018. More than 83% of refugees in Jordan live in urban areas.<sup>4</sup>

The country has recently initiated important reforms aiming at economic transformation and long-term prosperity, with a focus on sustainable growth, youth employment, education and a geostrategic entry-point to markets in the Middle East, Europe and Africa.<sup>5</sup>

The [London Initiative](#) (February 2019) signals renewed international support for investment, growth and jobs for Jordan as the country wishes to position itself as a regional hub for industry, technology, tourism and skilled-services.<sup>6</sup>

## Higher Education Regulation

The Jordanian higher education system is regulated by two laws: the [Law of Higher Education No.23 \(2009\)](#) establishes the duties and powers of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHE), the Higher Education Council (HEC) and its responsibilities as well as the Scientific Research Support Fund. The [Jordanian Universities Law No. 20 \(2009\)](#) establishes the administrative and financial independence of public and private higher education institutions and clarifies their institutional governance.<sup>7</sup>

The current [MOHE](#) was established in 2001 by Royal Decree to oversee all public and private higher education institutions. The Ministry is responsible for implementing the higher education policy, coordination among public and private institutions, recognition of non-Jordanian institutions and certificates, management of Jordanian outward student

### Note

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>

<sup>2</sup>

<http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1078151891&Country=Jordan&topic=Summary&subtopic=Fact+sheet>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>;

<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Jordan%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20June%202018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview#1>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.londonjordan.co.uk/londonjordan/contenttab/s/?ctid=2692>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mohe.gov.jo/en/pages/BriefMohe1.aspx>

mobility and conclusion of higher education and scientific research agreements on with other countries. It also assists the HEC and provides it with relevant studies.

The Higher Education Council (HEC) is chaired by the HE Minister and comprises the Secretary General of the Ministry, the President of the Higher Education Accreditation Commission, seven Full Professors, and the Director of Education at the Jordanian Armed Forces. The HEC has a number of responsibilities, including:

- Drafting the policy of higher education and submitting it to the Cabinet for approval,
- Approving the establishment of higher education institutions in Jordan and approving the fields of studies and programmes at all levels,
- Supervising universities to ensure the fulfilment of their objectives and duties and issuing the necessary bylaws required by the law,
- Allocating (distributing) government funding to public universities,
- Approving admission criteria and the number of students to be admitted each year,
- Appointing the Boards of Trustees of private universities and approving the appointment of the Presidents of the private universities.
- Recommending the appointments of Presidents of public universities.

The [Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions](#) (AQACHEI) was established in 2007 and aims to advance quality and equity in higher education in Jordan whether in assessment, ranking, or conducting valid, reliable, and unbiased testing services. It also strives to improve the status of higher education in the Kingdom; assuring its quality; motivating higher education institutions to open up to and interact with universities, scientific research institutions, and international accreditation and quality control

commissions; and developing higher education by employing internationally-comparable standards.

The [Scientific Research Support Fund](#) aims at encouraging and supporting the scientific research in the kingdom and enjoys administrative and financial independence. The Fund has a board of directors headed by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, or his deputy secretary general. The fund is also responsible for contributing to scientific research programs and projects implemented under cooperative, scientific and technical agreements with countries, international organizations, Arabic, Islamic and foreign institutions.

### Higher Education System

The University of Jordan was established in 1962, as the first university in the country. Since then the system has expanded significantly. There are 12 public universities, 18 private universities and two not-for-profit institutions in Jordan.

Financial resources of public universities consist of fixed fees per semester and tuition charged per credit hour, government appropriations in the annual national budget, gifts and grants, and income gained from consultation and research outcomes and results. Government funding covers 10-15% of the overall operational expenses. To become more sufficient, universities have introduced a so-called "Parallel Programme" where students who are not admitted on a competitive basis pay higher fees. Private institutions are funded mostly through students' tuition fees and make a profit that goes back to the owner, yet their budget must be approved by the HEC.<sup>8</sup>

The Jordanian higher education system follows the US model and is credit-based employing the three-cycle system: Bachelor's degrees generally require four years of study; master's

### Note

<sup>8</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches\\_jordan\\_2017.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_jordan_2017.pdf)

degrees require one and a half to two years of study and students have the option to conclude the degree with a thesis or a comprehensive exam. Doctorate degrees require a minimum of three years of study and are only offered by a small number of selected universities.<sup>9</sup>

### Higher Education Priorities

In its [National Strategy and Vision 2025](#) the Jordanian Government has identified higher education as one of its priorities to tackle unemployment and support economic prosperity. Two priorities stand out: First, the quality of education shall be improved through capacity building of (academic) staff to re-establish Jordan as a destination of choice for students from the region. Second, higher education shall support developing the private sector and entrepreneurial skills. The MOHE is therefore very keen to enhance technical and vocational degree programmes, as well as university-industry links. The government in its strategy recognizes the benefit of international partnerships to address these priorities.

#### Note

<sup>9</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches\\_jordan\\_2017.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_jordan_2017.pdf)

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

## Research Collaboration

The UK is ranked third in terms of Jordan's research collaboration partners – after the US and Saudi Arabia. In the period 2016- 2018, 694 publications were produced between researchers of the two countries, which represents an increase of 21.4%. The most important areas for research were Medicine (20.7%), Computer Science (12.0%), Engineering (9.3%), Social Sciences (5.7%) and Business and Administrative Studies (5.5%).<sup>10</sup>

Alongside the [Global Challenges Research Fund](#), the [Newton Khalidi Fund](#) is the primary vehicle for research collaborations in Jordan. Established in 2017, priority areas of the fund include energy, water management, Agri-tech and food security, cultural heritage, bio-technology and bio-security and nanotechnology. British Council Newton Fund calls can be found [here](#).

- [Hussein Technical University \(HTU\)](#), a not-for-profit institution established in 2016 by the Crown Prince Foundation to support Jordanian youth's pursuit of vocational, technical and applied education, is looking for research collaborations in international applied technology.

## Mobility

According to HESA data, there is potential for more mobility between the two countries. In the academic year 2017/18, 895 Jordanian undergraduates and 920 Jordanian postgraduates came to study in the UK. The total number of 1,815 Jordanian students in the UK presents a 20.1% increase since 2013/14. The most popular subject areas for Jordanian

students in the UK include business and administrative studies, engineering and technology and law. The Jordanian Government does not provide funding, but instead institutional full degree scholarships are available, especially for PhDs, with the requirement to return to work at the Jordanian institution. A semester or year abroad for Jordanian undergraduate students must be self-funded and organised.

The stable political environment and extensive Arabic language offer also shows potential for increased outward student mobility from the UK. Jordan was the second most popular destination in the region for UK students in 2017-18: 185 UK students came to spend a period of their studies in Jordan; this presents a 20% increase compared to the previous academic year.<sup>11</sup> Many of these instances of mobility were facilitated via [Erasmus+/ICM](#).

- The [University of Jordan](#) is looking to fund more of their students to obtain a PhD in the UK and to arrange one-year long placements with UK HE institutions for their academic staff. The aim is to improve their staff's teaching and research skills as well as English language skills. They are also happy to receive students from the UK for Arabic language studies during the semester or the summer.
- HTU is interested in two-way mobility programmes with UK institutions, especially in the areas of applied technology and entrepreneurship. HTU is also trying to provide a framework for an apprenticeship programme for which collaborations around international placements would be of interest.

## Transnational Education

Despite a relatively difficult regulatory environment, 1,675 Jordanian students were enrolled in UK transnational education (TNE) in

### Note

<sup>10</sup> SciVal Data, accessed July 2019.

<sup>11</sup> HESA student record 2017-18 (HESA: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>)

2017-18. Excluding the three main TNE providers, the number was 560 TNE students and has increased by 120% since 2013-14. The primary type of provision is distance, flexible or online learning, while a small number are registered in joint programmes studying for a UK degree in Jordan.<sup>12</sup>

Two options for TNE are possible in Jordan: A Jordanian institution can either host a foreign institution at their campus or establish a joint degree. For instance, the University of Bedfordshire is working in [partnership](#) with [Middle East University \(MEU\)](#), a private, for-profit university in Amman. The university delivers a [range of courses](#) at undergraduate and postgraduate level at MEU with some of the classes taught in conjunction with London School of Commerce, (LSC).

challenging not only due to high UK tuition fees and lacking scholarships but also due to a lack of awareness of the UK higher education sector and institutions.

Additionally, the Jordanian higher education system is modelled on the US credit-based system and teaching still has a greater significance than independent research for many institutions. Jordanian partners would therefore be interested in a larger teaching part, especially in the first two years of PhD programmes.

Finally, it is essential to engage the MOHE in discussions about partnership models and ways to facilitate the regulatory environment.

- MEU is looking for more UK HEI partners to set up joint programmes in media, IT, interior design, civil engineering, law and medicine. As it is a private institution, there is more flexibility around the degree requirements and the university is keen to cater for any facility requirements of the UK partner.
- [Jadara University](#) is interested in joint master's degrees in Software Engineering and Public Management as well as PhD programmes in Accounting and Law.

### Challenges to Collaborative Relationships

Despite a good level of existing engagement and potential for future collaborations, challenges persist.

As financial resources in Jordan are limited and the country is reliant on foreign assistance, the government is unable to provide scholarships for Jordanian students to study in the UK. The US has managed to gain a strong position in higher education in the country by offering scholarships, especially for PhDs, and dynamic marketing strategy. Also, building on German development aid and the position of the German-Jordanian University, Germany has a good reputation for higher education, especially in vocational training. Recruiting more Jordanian students to UK institutions might therefore be

#### Note

<sup>12</sup> HESA AOR 2017/18  
(<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c16052/introduction>)

# CONTACT DETAILS

Please find below the contact details for the British Embassy in Amman as well as British Council Jordan. Their teams are happy to provide you with more information about the operating environment and opportunities for collaborating with Jordan in higher education.

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# ANNEX A: UUKI ENGAGEMENT WITH JORDAN

Despite a growing level of engagement between Jordanian and UK higher education institutions, there has previously not been any systematic engagement with Jordan from UUKi's side. Potential for collaboration with the Jordanian higher education sector therefore led UUKi to undertake a study visit with three UK HEI representatives to Amman from 17 to 18 June 2019.

## UUKi Study Visit

### Objectives

The objectives of the visit were to

- Gain a better understanding of the Jordanian higher education landscape, its priorities and internationalisation agenda.
- Learn about opportunities and barriers to collaborations between the UK and Jordanian HE sectors.
- Connect with relevant Jordanian governmental bodies and HE institutions to create efficient communication channels that will support future collaborations and links between HEIs.
- Promote the excellence and diversity of UK HEIs as reliable and valuable partners in student and staff exchange, research as well as transnational education.
- Raise awareness regarding the UK HE sector, and UUKi's role as a key interlocutor to connect with the UK HE sector.

### Programme

British Council Jordan supported the programme of the visit. The programme included the following:

- Meeting with the Secretary General of the Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research as well as relevant directorates;
- Meeting with the UK Ambassador to Jordan;
- Institutional visits to the University of Jordan, Hussein Technical University and Middle East University
- An information session on the Newton Fund co-hosted by the British Council Jordan and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The information session was attended by around 60 representatives from 20 Jordanian universities