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EGYPT

New regional higher education initiatives under way



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Egypt has launched new higher education initiatives including a plan to set up branches of Alexandria University in Lebanon and Malaysia, establishing an Arab higher education area and joining the Arab and European Leadership Network for Higher Education.

The initiatives will give Egypt's universities a greater regional presence, facilitate the mobility of postgraduate students among Arab universities and help to improve university leadership, governance and management.

Branch campuses

On 22 July the council of graduate studies and research at Alexandria University – Egypt's second largest institution – adopted partnership agreements with the Charitable Lebanese Association and the Malaysian Falcon Company to create branch campuses in those countries.

"These conventions represent a major shift in the history of Alexandria University," said Sedek Abdul Salam, vice-president for graduate studies and research.

Egyptian universities have established a number of international branch campuses, including a branch of Alexandria University (Tong city) in South Sudan and a branch of Cairo University in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, with faculties in four Sudanese states.

According to the **website** of the Union of Islamic World Students, Al-Azhar University is considering establishing branch campuses around the world, including in America, Bangladesh, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Madagascar, Sudan and Tanzania.

Arab higher education area

Egypt's Supreme Council of Universities has formed a committee to establish an Arab higher education area, or AHEA, according to a **report** published last month by the Sada el-balad website.

AHEA will focus on establishing compatible and transparent higher education systems and comparable standards in management, teaching and research, on providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to continue learning independently, and on facilitating mobility among postgraduate students.

A system of joint certificates for masters and doctoral degrees among Arab universities participating in AHEA will be set up. Also, a joint electronic higher education system for the Arab world will be developed comprising 25% of traditional learning inside universities and 75% through e-communications.

Network for university leaders

To tackle leadership challenges in the Arab world, three universities from Egypt, three from Morocco and two from Lebanon and Tunisia have joined the Arab and European Leadership Network for Higher Education, ARELEN, which the Jordan-based Association of Arab Universities and the UK-based Cardiff Metropolitan University have agreed to host.

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Mohamed Loutfi, dean of international development at Cardiff Metropolitan, told *University World News*: “The establishment of ARELEN is a significant step in sustaining Tempus Leadership in Higher Education Management centres.”

Loutfi said the network would help to train aspiring and existing leaders on how to lead academic institutions in a dynamic environment, and to achieve knowledge transfer from Europe to Arab states via prestigious leadership organisations such as the Leadership Foundation in the UK and the Association of Arab Universities.

“An organisational board will be established with independent financial means that will oversee the continuation of the leadership centres and open new centres throughout the Arab world,” Loutfi said.

“Of special interest is the establishment of the equal opportunity centres, which will have a priority of promoting the role of women leaders in higher education.

“ARELEN is thus a significant instrument to help Arab universities in their quest to become truly global, and can really make a difference to the future of higher education in the Arab region and beyond,” Loutfi concluded.

Sultan Abu-Orabi, secretary general of the Association of Arab Universities, told *University World News* that the joint hosting of the leadership network would help to ensure a sustainable outcome for the project in the Middle East and North Africa.

“Training workshops for higher education leaders in the Arab and Europe regions will be organised and supported by the TEMPUS programme,” Abu-Orabi pointed out.

Tarek Saif, a researcher at Egypt's National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries, welcomed the ARELEN development, which he sees as “a tool for human capital development through building effective leadership practice within Arab universities.

“The network activities must not only promote the transfer or import of ready-made frameworks of Western leadership approaches from European universities to higher education institutions in the Arab world,” Saif told *University World News*.

It should focus on ‘tailor-made’ leadership approaches based on best practices in global leadership education, and local leadership perspectives that bear in mind local culture and higher education realities.

“The network must aim to produce a clear Arabised leadership development model with a strategic plan for implementation in Arab universities,” Saif concluded.

Saif's view was echoed by Syeda Tanveer Naim, advisor to the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation Standing Commission on Science and Technology, who said university leadership in Arab and Muslim countries reflected historical, political and cultural realities.

Muslim culture and traditions had suffered greatly during colonisation, he told *University World News*, with colonial powers introducing Western technologies and knowledge instead of building on indigenous knowledge and technology.

“The university and research leadership in Arab and Muslim countries remains confused, divided and torn between two cultures,” Naim added.

“In a globalised knowledge system, university leaderships will have to carry out reforms to adapt and adopt global best practices, without losing sight of the relevance of knowledge to local economies. This requires strong, committed and visionary leadership not only at the university level only but also at the level of the state.”

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