



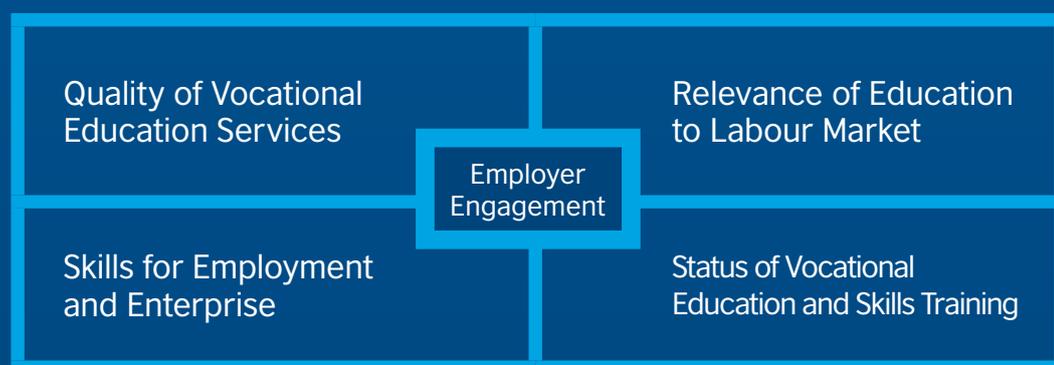
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN NORTH AFRICA

WORKSHOP ORGANISED BY THE BRITISH COUNCIL
IN BRUSSELS, OCTOBER 2013

www.britishcouncil.org

The aim of this interactive seminar was to allow European Union (EU) Institutions and other Brussels-based organisations to engage with North African civil society and British Council field managers, to address the challenges of youth employment (I), to present concrete changes resulting from our programmes (II) and to provide further recommendations (III).

STRATEGIC APPROACH OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL REGARDING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT



I. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN NORTH AFRICA?

Guest speakers:

- **Professor Ouidad Tebaa**, Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, University of Cadi Ayyad, Marrakesh, Morocco
- **Professor Sif-Eddine Amara**, Head of Chemistry and Physics, University of Technological Sciences Houari Boumediene, Algeria
- Moderated by **Nigel Bellingham**, Director British Council Tunisia

Youth unemployment in North Africa remains amongst the highest in the world. A striking problem in North Africa is that of graduate unemployment, which can be explained partly through **skills mismatch between academia and industry**. 20% of graduates are unemployed which is one of the highest rates in the world.¹

“My University is a massive structure with around 68,000 students, 20,000 of whom are studying arts and humanities. The curriculum is too theoretical and the students have little contact with the professional world. There are tensions in our universities, mainly because of frustrations about the lack of coherence between the demands of the workplace and the way we educate our youngsters. It is scandalous that it is among those who are privileged enough to have access to higher education that unemployment is at its highest.”

Professor Tebaa outlined the specific problems facing her institution

In Algeria, indicated Professor Amara, the academic community is aware that young people do not meet the demands of the marketplace and is trying to tackle this “but local efforts are insufficient”.

For example, “the university has signed contracts with lots of big companies from different industrial sectors including petroleum and banking, but this is a drop of water in comparison with what needs to happen.” Likewise, “we run programmes à la carte, for some companies who have specific needs and ask for our help, but this is rare,” he added.

However, various programmes in Morocco are dedicated to boost **entrepreneurship skills** among young graduates for them to set up their own companies. Some were launched in 2006 to help 30,000 young graduates set up their own companies, but only 4,000 graduates have joined the scheme. “Most young people in the region lack the confidence skills,” stressed Professor Tebaa. Algeria has also introduced mechanisms to help young graduates start their own companies, “but lots of them don’t last long. We do not have enough expertise to reduce the death rate of start-ups. It is not worth investing in these companies if they are just left to die,” said Professor Amara

Professor Tebaa also underlined the **linguistic challenges** faced by students. “Being in Marrakesh, they have regular contact with tourists and different languages, but **their language skills are often deficient**.”² As in Morocco, the late introduction of French in Algeria, apart from in private schools, means that in the first year of university, where the only teaching language is French, ¾ of the students struggle.

Professor Amara also highlighted the issue of **overcrowding and lack of resources** – there are 31,000 students in the university, which was originally intended to host 8,000 students.

Another real problem is the lack of work in Algeria once students have completed their education. “Among students who finish a Master’s degree, seven out of ten of them will ask for a letter of recommendation with **plans to leave for the United States or the European Union**.” Professor Amara said.

¹ According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 26% of young people in the North Africa are unemployed. The figure rises to around 37% for young women.

² Moroccans’ two mother tongues are Darija and Tamazight and school education is in Classic Arabic and French. Children in the public schools receive too little language education and reach university ill-equipped to study in either French or Arabic.

II. THE BRITISH COUNCIL AS A FACILITATOR OF CHANGE

Guest speakers:

- **Melanie Relton**, Regional Vocational Education Manager, British Council Middle East and North Africa
- **Denise Waddingham**, Director Partnership, British Council Egypt
- **Taoufik Saoudi**, Tunisian entrepreneur
- **Awatef Shawesh**, Assistant Director Programmes, British Council Libya
- **Roland Singer**, Skills for Employability Manager, British Council Morocco
- Moderated by **Jim Buttery**, Director Programmes, British Council Middle East and North Africa

Having worked in North Africa for over 75 years and present in every country, the British Council transfers technical knowledge to help tackle many of the issues raised by Professors Tebaa and Amara. It is currently carrying out €5-million worth of projects in the field of technical and vocational education for the EU in Iraq, Lebanon and Libya.

The British Council has a **convening power** that underpins all its approaches, **bringing representatives from government, the private sector and civil society together**.

In order for young people to access the workplace of 21st century, **Melanie Relton** detailed the British Council's **Skills for Employability** programme, which is running in 11 countries in the region. Its goal is to support the development of high-level quality skills systems. "We have changed our approach, moving from activities that benefitted an individual or an institution to a more **holistic, sustainable, flexible approach**," she explained. "This better responds to the region or country needs and will result in systematic change that will leave a lasting legacy."

Addressing skills through employers' engagement

"We want to showcase examples where we have worked with the private sector in order to help reduce the gap between academia and the workplace. We are working to give employers a voice in education – and support education to respond more effectively to industry needs. Industry also needs its current and future workforce to be enterprising. Innovation must be at the heart of the curriculum. We have worked with over 200 teachers, who have created change within their institutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya."

Melanie Relton

As well as the economic benefit, supporting new and existing small business has cultural, social and ethical benefits. However, young people and employers need access to training, support and networks if they are to create and manage sustainable business.

The British Council has in recent years trained over 6000 people, supported 600 business start-ups and scale-ups through its small business programme.

In Egypt alone, the Council has reached over 500 employers through its skills development partnerships. "We want to support pilot projects that can be scaled up to work at a national level and create systemic change and offer strategic benefits for all stakeholders from the start," concluded Melanie Relton.

One project that has successfully met these criteria is the Modern Apprenticeship Programme in Egypt. Denise Waddingham described how this scheme, which builds on the UK modern apprenticeship model and best industry practice in Egypt, has already aroused significant interest from government. The scheme involves a **16-week training programme in the workplace and is accredited by both the Egyptian authorities and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).**

The first programme was run in conjunction with Fresh Electric, an Egyptian white goods and air conditioner manufacturing company, which has 11 factories in Egypt and 6000 staff. The chosen apprentices were taught technical skills as well as soft skills, such as how to treat clients and how to avoid dangers when working.

Outside of this scheme there is little training and so technicians must normally pick up skills on the job. The training taught them to take pride in their work and proved that making a decent living from a vocational job is possible. Fresh Electric also saved 50,000 Egyptian pounds (5,427 Euro), as following their training the technicians were able to fix the circuit boards the company historically threw away, creating a win-win situation for all involved!

The next stage is to run a national pilot with other white goods manufacturers and then to scale up the programme and to expand it into other sectors.

Melanie Relton

Entrepreneurship and peer-mentoring

This new focus is based on enterprise and entrepreneurialism which supports learning and development that encourages and provides young people with the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills, competences and qualities, so that they can set up and grow their own businesses and become the next generation of employers.

To encourage change from the bottom up, the British Council has created a network of peer-mentors who have benefitted from its programmes. "We are using social media to create a network across six countries via which entrepreneurs can ask questions to their peers," explained Melanie Relton.

Taoufik Saoudi is one entrepreneur who benefitted from the Souk Attanmia SME partnership training programme in Tunisia. This programme, managed by the African Development Bank is implemented by a consortium of 17 partners. The British Council's role in the programme was to provide business management training to 300 young entrepreneurs, from which 71 were selected to be awarded start up grants and mentoring from other partners.

"Three years ago, I employed 20 women in my company selling artisanal products. Taking part in Souk At-tanmia allowed me to diversify the company's products and start selling to the EU and the US," said Mr Saoudi. "We now trade with Milan, Frankfurt and New York. We employ 50 women and hope to grow further."

Taoufik Saoudi praised the programme for being "grounded in reality" for being run by "coaches", not administrators, who offered practical advice on real business problems. He learnt how to extend a business to new markets, how to improve employees' wages and ways to navigate the often tortuous route to getting finance.

Getting women into work

In all countries across the region, it is women who have the greatest need of employability skills. This was particularly the case in Libya before 2011, as **Awatef Shawesh** explained. “Although women played a role in the revolution in the immediate aftermath, they lacked the necessary skills needed to participate in the rebuilding of the country.”

The British Council therefore began to roll out its Springboard empowerment programme for women that had been running in the Gulf Region. This focused on helping women see their own potential so they can develop their skills and self-belief, and ultimately their careers. The British Council has so far trained five women trainers in Libya and in total over 1200 women have been reached through the programme.

Innovative skills for creative industry

The focus in Morocco is to help young people gain the soft skills currently missing from university programmes. **Roland Singer** shared information about the scheme known as Fabrikamode, which is being piloted with fashion students. The training on soft skills includes **analytical thinking, team work, communications, leading a team, how to behave professionally, how to take the initiative, and creativity.**³

Around 7% of GDP comes from creative industries in Morocco, encompassing both traditional arts and crafts as well as modern digital media, computer gaming and fashion. The latter are high growth, young industries. “To develop skills, trainers have to talk the talk of young people,” insisted Roland Singer.

During the first week of the Fabrikamode programme, teams are formed and the students have to create a concept and a business model. In a second phase, which lasts six weeks, the students are mentored by business men and women before their ideas are judged by industry representatives. The winning student company is awarded funding and will be incubated in Morocco’s fashion college.

³ Another important project in Morocco initiated by the British Council is the creation of a certificate that officially recognises the soft skills competencies of graduates. This tool was requested by employers and two of Morocco’s biggest universities will include it as part of the curriculum for all interested students. The final certificate will be awarded by the general confederation of Moroccan enterprises (CGEM).

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NORTH AFRICA

Enhancing Youth Employment

<p>Enhancing Quality of Vocational Education Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build confidence in system Better qualifications recognised by employers Improve quality of delivery clearer progression routes 	<p>Increasing the Relevance of Education to labour Market:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop industry – led curricula and learning materials Integrate work experience opportunities in the curricula Better understanding of industry needs 	<p>Improving the status of skills Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build understanding of job opportunities Build sustainable forums and social networking to engage young people. Campaigns to raise profile and status of skills development 	<p>Enhancing skills for Employment and Enterprise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed enterprise education across curricula Provide a broad set of skills/knowledge Recognise other Skills & experience Support & encourage Young entrepreneurs
<p>Increasing Effective Employer Engagement: Build commitment to education and industry collaboration; Gather accurate LMI and use it strategically; Enhance the existing careers guidance services and information; Support transition of young people into employment & self-employment</p>			
<p>Developing Institutional Leadership: Establish structures to encourage institutions to be semi-autonomous; Empowering leaders</p>	<p>Perceptions & Role of Young People: Commitment to employing young people; Young people as future drivers of growth</p>		

To address the challenges raised by Professors Tebaa and Amara and build upon the good practice and success achieved across its programmes, the British Council advocates specifically the following:

- 1. A clear focus on employer engagement.** It is essential that any proposed reform or initiative that aims to tackle youth employment provides employers with the skillsets that they need in new employees, whether graduate or non-graduate.
- 2. A sustained initiative to understand better the functioning and trends of the labour market,** for example, through research studies and the creation of labour market observatories, in explicit collaboration with employers.
- 3. Support for change in the governance of the Vocational Education training and Skills sectors,** e.g. developing institutional leadership (establishing structures to encourage institutions to be semi-autonomous).
- 4. A focus on enhancing the quality of vocational education** in order to build confidence in the system.

5. Enhancing skills for employment and enterprise through embedding enterprise education across curricula.

Ummuhan Bardak, Labour expert at the European Training Foundation (ETF) endorsed the previous recommendations and added the following:

6. Making vocational training and working in the private sector more attractive to young people through:
 - Economic incentives
 - Reducing the dichotomy of working standards between the public and private sector e.g. improve working conditions and health and social protection in the private sector.
7. Differentiated approach in responding to these challenges. Programmes aimed at tackling employability should recognise that young people are not a homogenous group.
8. Focusing on enterprise development. Priority should be given to entrepreneurs and SMEs who want to expand their business and on graduate entrepreneurs.



All photography © Mat Wright

© **British Council** 2013

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.