

# MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN SYRIA AND THE UK IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR



In its 10th year plan (2005-2010), the Syrian Government identified Education and training as one of its priorities. Its budget for education in 2006 totals USD 626 million and Higher Education USD 362 million.

The key focus is on higher education and a reform strategy paper for the Higher Education sector was produced in 2005. The EU have allocated Euro 10 mill for upgrading the Higher Education sector.

UK expertise in skills development is widely recognised in Syria and demand for materials like ICT, educational aids and English printed materials is growing.

UK universities and institutions are now working as award issuing authorities in joint venture with 4 of the 9 newly established private universities in Syria and in other different educational institutes. These include Kensington College, University of Glamorgan, University of Westminster, Edexel Educational Establishment and LCCI.

The growing private sector-private schools, NGOs and suppliers for educational aids- is responding to developments in the Higher Education sector and is seeking materials to prepare students for this new type of university curriculum. It is

specifically interested in UK ICT materials and printed English language materials.

In response to the local Syrian market's demand for this new expertise, the Trade & Investment Section at the British Embassy in Damascus organised a number of Inward Missions to British Education Suppliers Shows both regionally and in the UK. These Inward Missions were organised in co-operation with UKTI London and the British Educational Suppliers Association.

The Syrian delegates to these events were decision makers at their respective company; organisation; school. They came back with very positive feed back on contacts made with education suppliers in the UK. They explored provision of a variety of high quality attractive materials and products which potentially meet the demands of the Syrian market. These include publications, teaching aids, art, art crafts, playground equipment, stationery and ICT materials.

The Syrian delegates to the British Education Shows represent a small proportion of Syrian Firms who want to do business with the UK. The Trade & Investment Section in Damascus is receiving an increasing number of enquiries on a daily basis for details of universities and education aids suppliers in the UK.

Inaugurated on 2nd September 2002 by President Bashar Al-Assad, the Syrian Virtual University (SVU) is a public institution, fully accredited and endorsed by the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education. The SVU offers students, at home or abroad, the opportunity to gain a quality world-class education through an integrated online learning environment, based on the latest technology.

This unique e-learning programme, developed through a partnership of leading educational institutions including Greenwich University, Baker College Online and Bellevue University, is designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge to enhance employment opportunities at home or abroad. It's accessible, enabling students to study wherever they are, and offers flexibility to meet students' own aims and ambitions.

SVU selected Greenwich University and EDEXCEL as official partners on the basis of their reputation, particularly in accreditation and their range of specialisation. Greenwich and EDEXEL offer the same content, tutoring and all services available to any of their own students as well as their internationally