

**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)**

Evaluation Report

of the

Regional Center for Quality and Excellence in Education (RCQE)

Under the auspices of UNESCO

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States

Beirut, 1 July 2020

Executive Summary

1. In its 37th session convened in 2013, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted a resolution in favor of establishing a Regional Center for Quality and Excellence in Education, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as a category 2 center under the auspices of UNESCO.
2. On October 21, 2014, an agreement was signed between UNESCO and the MOE in the KSA concerning the establishment and functioning of the Centre.
3. According to section E.2 of the UNESCO's Strategy for category 2 Institutes and Centres under its auspices (2019), a review of the Centre's work must take place before the possible renewal of the agreement.
4. UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut, who was entrusted to manage the evaluation process, appointed a former high-level UNESCO staff member to carry out the evaluation. The evaluator carried out the evaluation in May 2020.
5. In line with the TORs of the evaluation, the evaluator performed a desk study of more than one hundred documents provided by the Centre or downloaded from its website or the web, and conducted email and telephone interviews with two members of each the following categories of the Center's stakeholders: the senior staff of the Centre including its director, the governing board of the Centre, the Scientific Committee established by the Center, UNESCO Beirut Office senior staff including its director, and implementing partners.
6. The evaluator considered each of the parameters set out in the UNESCO Strategy for the renewal evaluation, as well as the other requirements of the Strategy. The following paragraphs summarize the findings of the evaluation for each parameter for the period 2015-2019. The evaluation is followed by a set of recommendations concerning the renewal of the Agreement and the improvement of the functioning of the Center.
7. Concerning Parameter 1 related to the extent to which the Centre's objectives as set out in the agreement signed with UNESCO were achieved, the evaluation found that the activities performed by the Center were in line with the objectives as set out in the Agreement. However, the Center was short of becoming a hub for quality and excellence in education expertise in the Arab States as set in these objectives. In addition, the studies undertaken have seldom been followed by consistent follow-up activities aimed at awareness raising and capacity building at national and regional levels. Thus, the contribution of the Centre to "spreading awareness about quality and excellence in education" appears relatively modest.
8. As for the relevance of the contribution of the Centre's programmes and activities to the achievement of UNESCO's prevailing Approved Programmes and Budgets (C/5) as set in Parameter 2 and the relevance of the contribution of the activities of the Centre to global development agendas as set in Parameter 3, the evaluation found that the management of the Center has taken care to link the Center's overall strategy and yearly projects to UNESCO approved C/5 for the relevant years and hence link them to various targets of SDG4, particularly as regards ECCE, teacher policies and training, and the inclusion of global citizenship in general education curricula. However, the activities lacked consistent integrated vision concerning the quality of education in the Member States of the Region as expected from the Center and did not address issues such as the future of learning, social/emotional learning, new pedagogies, critical thinking, etc.

9. Concerning Parameter 4 related to the quality of coordination and interaction with UNESCO, both at Headquarters and in the field, as well as with National Commissions, other thematically related category 1 and 2 institutes or centres with regard to planning and implementation of programmes, the evaluation found that much of the activities undertaken by the Center have been done in coordination with other various UNESCO entities at the regional as well as at the international levels. A shadow zone in this regard concerns the relationships with the National Commissions. In fact, the Center's Master Strategy lacks reference to the National Commissions and there are in the description of the various activities undertaken by the Center no indication if and how the National Commissions of the Arab States were involved.
10. As for the partnerships developed and maintained with government agencies, public or private partners and donors as required by Parameter 5, there is clear evidence that the Center has established working partnerships with KSA relevant government agencies, and many public and private partners and donors at the national, regional, and international levels. However, the regional network of the Center appears to be relatively poor compared to the expectations raised when it was established. For example, the Center has no working relationships or weak relationships with ALECSO, ISESCO and other potential regional and international partners.
11. A specific challenge facing the Center concerns developing partnerships on a sustainable basis and institutionalizing the fiscal relationships between the Center and its partners. Another challenge concerns enhancing its visibility among a wide array of potential partners and stakeholders across the Arab Region.
12. Concerning Parameter 6 related to the nature and efficiency of the Centre's governance, including organizational arrangements, management, human resources and accountability mechanisms, the evaluation found that all required texts have been adopted by the Center, are in line with the provisions of the Agreement, and have been generally quite well implemented, except as concerns the accountability mechanisms against the KPIs foreseen in the Master Strategy of the Center that will be performed in the 2020-2021 cycle of activities, and the staffing table as explained in the next paragraph.
13. In fact, although the Center enjoys a generous annual fixed endowment decided by a Royal decree of the Government of Saudi Arabia, and has raised some extrabudgetary resources, thus ensuring sustainable institutional capacity and viability as required by Parameter 7, the Center has been short of ensuring a critical mass of stable and highly qualified professional staff to undertake the various substantive other than administrative functions it is expected to perform. In fact, although the Agreement and the constitution of the Center state that the Governing Board examine at its annual meeting the staffing table proposed for the Center, it seems that this question has never been explicitly put on the agendas of these meetings.
14. Concerning the extent to which the Centre enjoys within its territory the autonomy necessary for the execution of its activities and legal capacity to contract, institute legal proceedings, and to acquire and dispose of movable and immovable property as set in Parameter 8, the evaluation revealed that although the normative texts concerning the Center and the practice show the existence of such an autonomy to a certain degree, there is a need to clarify the ways and means to provide the Center with professional staff in light with its autonomy in this endeavor and the provision of the Agreement to the effect that "the Government shall make available to the Centre the administrative staff necessary for the performance of its functions".
15. In light of the evaluation, nine recommendations were formulated as follows:

- (a) Recommendation for the renewal of the Agreement that may be conditional to the presentation by the Center of an action plan for the fulfilment of the other recommendations;
- (b) Recommendation for the reinforcement of the professional staff of the Center;
- (c) Recommendation to enhance the visibility and usefulness to the studies undertaken by the Center;
- (d) Recommendation to become part of a regional Arab educational information network to make the studies undertaken by the Center available regionally to a wide public;
- (e) Recommendation to develop an appropriate communication strategy in order to strengthen and widen the Center's networks;
- (f) Recommendation to link the programs, projects and activities of the Center more closely to UNESCO education agenda in the Arab region and to SDG4;
- (g) Recommendation to play a more active role in mobilizing extrabudgetary resources;
- (h) Recommendation to UNESCO to continue to associate the Center with the actions of its offices and centers in the Arab Region;
- (i) Recommendation to consider embedding into the objectives of the Center (Article 7 of the Agreement) a clear reference that the Center would seek in all its programs, projects, and activities to contribute to the achievement of SDG4.

A. Introduction

16. In its 37th session convened in 2013, the General Conference adopted a resolution in favor of establishing a Regional Center for Quality and Excellence in Education, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as a category 2 center under the auspices of UNESCO.
17. On October 21, 2014, an agreement was signed between UNESCO and the MOE in the KSA concerning the establishment and functioning of the Centre, hereafter referred to as the Agreement. (See Annex 1 for the text of the agreement)
18. According to section E.2 of the UNESCO's Strategy category 2 Institutes and Centres under its auspices (2019), a review of the Centre's work must take place before the possible renewal of the Agreement.

B. Methodology

19. UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut was entrusted to manage the evaluation process; and Dr Ramzi Salamé, a former high-level UNESCO staff member in the Arab Region, has been chosen to carry out the evaluation.
20. The evaluation took place in May 2020.
21. In line with the terms of reference of the contract between UNESCO and the evaluator (see Annex 2 to this report), the review of the Center's work included the following:
 - a. A desk study of more than one hundred relevant documents provided by the Center, downloaded from its website or from the web, or provided by UNESCO Secretariat, the most relevant of which are listed in Annex 3 to this report;
 - b. Exchange of emails and telephone calls with the Center's management, including its director and one senior staff member;
 - c. Interviews, by telephone and emails, with the Center's stakeholders including persons from each of the following categories: (i) the Governing Board of the Center; (ii) the Scientific Committee established by the Center, (iii) UNESCO Beirut Office management, including its director and one senior staff member, (iv) implementing partners. (see Annex 4 for the list of interviewees and Annex 5 for the topics discussed with the various interviewees)
 - d. It is worth mentioning that, according to the TORs of the evaluation and due to the COVID-19 situation worldwide during the period of the evaluation, no on-site visits were undertaken.
22. According to section E.2 of the UNESCO's Strategy for category 2 Institutes and Centres under its auspices (2019), reproduced in the TORs of the evaluation, the independent expert responsible for conducting the evaluation considered each of the parameters set out in the

UNESCO Strategy for the renewal evaluation, as well as the other requirements of the Strategy.

23. The following paragraphs summarize the findings of the evaluation for each parameter for the period 2015-2019¹.
24. Based on this evaluation, the expert drafted a set of recommendations to improve the functioning of the Centre and make it better achieve the objectives for which it was set.
25. Also, in line with the TORs of the evaluation, the expert assessed the extent to which the provisions of the current agreement need to be updated in order to conform to SDG 4 - Education 2030 and made recommendations on how the Centre can reinforce its contribution to UNESCO's programme.

C. Results of the Evaluation against the Evaluation Parameters

➤ Parameter 1: The extent to which the Centre's objectives as set out in the agreement signed with UNESCO were achieved

26. As set out in the agreement signed with UNESCO, the Centre's objectives consisted of the following : (a) spread awareness about quality and excellence in education ; (b) promote practices of educational quality implementation ; (c) validate and benchmark current practices against the most effective education systems ; (d) develop and apply practical ideas and best practices related to quality teaching and learning ; (e) look for new ideas and innovations that can act as feedstock for future strategic development in educational processes ; (f) create a hub of quality and excellence in education expertise in the Arab States, and to address human resources needs ; (g) develop research programs of a global quality through international partnerships to develop world class 0-12 education and training program.
27. Upon its establishment, the Center has undertaken a vast regional and international consultation process that has led to the adoption of a full-fledged « Master Strategy Plan (2015-2020)» that encompassed the following topics: (a) Quality Educators, with emphasis on teacher training and certification, and the status of the teaching profession; (b) Quality Curriculum, with emphasis on global citizenship, social responsibility, and knowledge economy; (c) Governance, with emphasis on strategic approaches and system management and measurement; and (d) Excellence Acknowledging Policies.
28. In this “Master Strategy Plan (2015-2020), the Center has also position itself as a service provider through a set of services aimed at a first phase at building and promoting its credibility, and consisting of research, establishing strong databases, establishing a strong network of partners and experts, knowledge dissemination, capacity building, facilitation/coordination, and fund management, to which it added consulting at a second wave as an expansion of its action to technical services.

¹ In fact, The Center has also subsequently developed an ambitious “Operational Plan” for 2019-2021 in which it renews its commitment to the “Master Strategy Plan” and expands its elements. However, since this is in fact a plan for 2020-2022, it has not been considered in the scope of the evaluation, except tangentially.

29. In line with the Master Strategy, the Center has developed yearly research projects, with particular attention to the following: developing research projects of high quality addressing key issues concerning the quality of education; looking for best practices, innovations, and benchmarking at the international level; and spreading awareness about quality and excellence in education through the organization and participation in various kinds of fora at the national, regional, and international levels.
30. According to the information submitted by the management to the GB, the Center has completed the following studies:
- a. The status of teacher education programs in the Arab World (2016-2017);
 - b. Indicators of quality education in the Arab region (2016-2017);
 - c. Excellence prizes in the Arab World (2016-2017);
 - d. National assessments of academic attainment of general education students' policies and practices in the Arab States (2016-2017);
 - e. Translation to Arabic of the book entitled: Quality Educators: An International Study on Teachers Competences and Standards (2016-2017);
 - f. Translation to Arabic of the book entitled: The Moral University (2016-2017);
 - g. Translation to Arabic of the book entitled: Smaller, Quicker, Cheaper: Improving Learning Assessments for Developing Countries (2016-2017);
 - h. Inclusion of global citizenship in general education curricula (2018-2019);
 - i. Inclusion of teacher policies in the educational systems in the Arab States (2018-2019);
 - j. Developmental review of teacher education for middle and high schools (2018-2019);
 - k. Role of the non-governmental sector in the attainment of quality education (2018-2019);
 - l. Increasing the enrolment in kindergarten in the Arab States (2018-2019);
 - m. The professional development and in-service training policies and programs in the Arab States (2018-2019).
31. However, although the Center has developed a dedicated website, and despite the inclusion in its Master Strategy of KPIs concerning the “regular production/dissemination of research reports”, the Center doesn't seem to have successfully created a hub for quality and excellence in education expertise in the Arab States as set in its objectives. In fact, the website is not regularly updated; it does not contain but few full texts of the completed researches and studies; the executive summaries of the researches and studies are not available to the scholars and the public; it does not mention the names and contact details of the scholars who have conducted the researches and studies; and the outputs are not indexed in such a way to be available to scholars, practitioners, and students across the Region and beyond.
32. In addition, the studies undertaken have seldom been followed by consistent follow-up activities aimed at capacity building at national and regional levels. Thus, the contribution

of the Centre to “spreading awareness about quality and excellence in education” appears relatively modest.

33. The Center has organized or participate in a number of international, regional, and national seminars and workshops concerning, among other things, teacher education, indicators of quality education, global education, quality ECCE, planned change, and learning cities. It has also celebrated international days such as Teacher’s Day, Children’s Day, World Quality Day, World Arabic Language Day.
34. The Center has also provided a certain number of consultancies within the KSA concerning, among other things, institutional development of the Faculty of Education in a local university and of distance education in another university, evaluation of the Portal of Education of the Kingdom, development of a national strategy to uplift the teaching profession, evaluation of sports education. It has also hosted a certain number of activities organized by other national bodies out of its corporate social responsibility stand. In these endeavors, the Center appears to have primarily been a technical arm to the Ministry of Education and some universities of KSA with little presence outside the Kingdom.
 - **Parameter 2: The relevance of the contribution of the Centre’s programmes and activities to the achievement of UNESCO’s prevailing Approved Programme and Budget (C/5) at the time in which it was designated, including global strategies and action plans as well as sectoral programme priorities, as defined in the agreement.**
 - **Parameter 3: The relevance of the contribution of the activities of the Centre to global development agendas.**
35. This evaluation covers particularly the periods of 38 C/5 (2016-2017) and 39 C/5 (2018-2019).
36. During the first period (2016-2017), UNESCO’s prevailing Approved Programme and Budget concerning the areas of action of the Center encompassed particularly the following expected results within the framework of MLA1 consisting in “Supporting Member States to develop education systems to foster high-quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all: (a) “National capacities strengthened, including through regional cooperation, to develop and implement teacher policies and strategies so as to enhance the quality of education and promote gender equality” (ER5); (b) “Capacities of Member States strengthened to promote, monitor and assess the processes and outcomes of competency-based learning” (ER6); (c) “National capacities strengthened to develop and implement technology policies in education, particularly in teacher training and professional development” (ER7). While all three ERs of MLA2 consisting in “Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens”, through “peace and human rights education” (ER8), “ESD education” (ER9), and “good quality health education” (ER10), may have concerned the Center.
37. During the second period (2018-2019), UNESCO’s prevailing Approved Programme and Budget concerning the areas of action of the Center encompassed almost all expected results set within the framework of MLA1 consisting in “Support Member States in the implementation of SDG 4, with possible exception of ER4 concerning higher education, and ER7 concerning gender equality, since all other ERs have something to do with education quality at 0-12 grades as is the mandate of the Center.

38. The management of the Center has taken care to link the Center's overall strategy and yearly projects to UNESCO approved C/5 for the relevant years and hence link them to various targets of SDG4. The most salient themes covered by the Center's activities concern 38 C/5 themes related to teacher policies, competency-based learning, and inclusion of global citizenship into general education curricula. While for the 39 C/5 – SDG 4, its activities were related to ER1 concerning ECCE, ER5 concerning teacher policies and training, ER6, in particular as concerns the inclusion of global citizenship in general education curricula, and ER8 as concerns the education of crisis-affected populations.
39. However, although the introduction of global citizenship and the education of crisis-affected population into the education agenda at the regional level is somewhat innovative, they are short of playing a consistent visionary role in education in the Member States of the Region as expected from the Center and do not tackle issues such as the future of learning, social/emotional learning, new pedagogies, critical thinking, etc.
40. In addition, the Center seems to have privileged being a laboratory of ideas over the other UNESCO modalities of action, i.e. standard setting, advocacy, awareness raising and capacity building, and regional coordination; and its contribution to the implementation of SDG 4 appears to have been made without an integrated vision and a clear plan of action.
41. In short, while the activities of the Center are in line with UNESCO's prevailing Approved Programmes and Budgets and with the global education development agendas, its contribution appears relatively modest and had not reached but few beneficiaries targeted in the Center's strategy.
- **Parameter 4: The quality of coordination and interaction with UNESCO, both at Headquarters and in the field, as well as with National Commissions, other thematically related category 1 and 2 institutes or centres with regard to planning and implementation of programmes**
42. There is evidence that much of the activities undertaken by the Center have been done in coordination with other various UNESCO entities at the regional as well as at the international levels as requested by the UNESCO's Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centers and, explicitly, by the 39 C/5, MLA 2 concerning the coordination of SDG4. UNESCO Beirut Office, the Regional Center for Educational Planning, a category 2 center based in the UAE, ABEGS, and IIEP appear among these entities.
43. A shadow zone in this regard concerns the relationships with the National Commissions. In fact, the Center's Master Strategy lacks reference to the National Commissions and there are in the description of the various activities undertaken by the Center no indication if and how the National Commissions of the Arab States were involved.
- **Parameter 5: The partnerships developed and maintained with government agencies, public or private partners and donors**
44. There is clear evidence that the Center has established working partnerships with KSA relevant government agencies, and some public and private partners and donors at the national, regional, and international levels. KSA Tatweer Holding for Educational Services, the KSA National Center for Measurement and Evaluation, and six other KSA entities, plus the MOEs of UAE and Sudan, the National Authority for Quality Assurance

and Accreditation of Education in Egypt, the Arab Organization for Quality Assurance in Education, and the Islamic Bank for Development appear among these entities.

45. Also, according to the documents provided by the Center, it seems that it has communicated with a very big number of national, regional, and international bodies. However, there is no information about the purposes of these contacts or their results.
46. In view of the above, the regional network of the Center appears to be relatively poor compared to the expectations raised when it was established. For example, the Center seems not to have working relationships with ALECSO, ISESCO and other potential regional and international partners.
47. A specific challenge facing the Center concerns maintaining and activating the partnerships already established on a sustainable basis and institutionalizing the fiscal relationships between them and the Center.
48. Another challenge concerns establishing new partnerships at the regional level and enhancing the visibility of the Center among a wide array of potential partners and stakeholders across the Arab Region.

➤ **Parameter 6: The nature and efficiency of the Centre's governance, including organizational arrangements, management, human resources and accountability mechanisms**

49. The constitution of the Center provides clear indications concerning the Center's governance and management arrangements. The Governing Board chaired by the KSA Minister of Education and comprising several ministers of education in the Arab States on rotational basis and other stakeholders, has annually met since 2015 according to agendas clearly set encompassing reports on the previous year substantive and financial activities and presentation of the program and budget for the following year.
50. It is worth noting that the Center has enjoyed since 2013 the steady commitment of the succeeding KSA ministers of Education.
51. However, no minutes of the meetings have been made available to the independent expert in charge of the evaluation, opening the way to guessing that the items on the various agendas of the meetings were approved as proposed by the management.
52. In addition, according to information gathered by the expert in charge of the evaluation, the Advisory Committee has not been utilized in the most effective manor to maximize its expert contributions. Neither in-person nor virtual Advisory Committee meetings have been conducted, and requests for advice have been infrequent and made on personal instead of on collective basis.
53. Meanwhile, the Center intends to implement during its 2020-2021 cycle of activities the accountability mechanisms related to the key performance indicators foreseen in its Master Strategy.
54. In fact, one of the weaknesses of the Center seems to be the lack of consistent organizational structure, commensurate with the functions it has to perform, with a clear staffing table and precise description of duties and responsibilities of each position that should normally be prepared by the management and approved by the Governing Board.

The organizational structures presented at the Governing Board meetings do not fit these requirements.

➤ **Parameter 7: The financial and human resources available for ensuring sustainable institutional capacity and viability**

55. The Center enjoys a generous annual fixed endowment decided by a Royal decree of the Government of Saudi Arabia amounting to ten million Saudi Riyal, equivalent to around two million and 665 thousand US dollars. It has also raised extrabudgetary resources, generally for specific activities it has undertaken, amounting to an average of around 150 thousand US dollars during the last three years.
56. However, sizeable portions of the successive endowments provided to it have not been used throughout the years, although there is a clear need to reinforce the institutional capacity of the Center by increasing the number of highly qualified personnel to monitor the researches and studies commissioned by the Center, to disseminate their outputs on sustainable basis across the Region, and to undertake the awareness raising and capacity building activities expected from the Center.
57. In fact, much of the weaknesses noted in the previous paragraphs are due to the fact that the Center has constantly lacked a critical mass of stable and highly qualified professional staff to undertake the various functions the Center is expected to perform. In this endeavor, it is worth noting that although the Agreement and the constitution of the Center state that the Governing Board examine at its annual meeting the staffing table proposed for the Center, this question has never been explicitly put on the agendas of these meetings.

➤ **Parameter 8: The extent to which the Centre enjoys within its territory the autonomy necessary for the execution of its activities and legal capacity to contract, institute legal proceedings, and to acquire and dispose of movable and immovable property**

58. According to its constitution, the Center enjoys the autonomy necessary to the execution of its activities as expected in the Agreement with UNESCO. In fact, the Center has exercised its legal capacity to contract studies and researches to various entities across the Arab States.
59. However, in terms of immovable property, the Government has fulfilled its duties to “make available to the Centre the facilities necessary to fulfil its objectives and functions” as required by the Agreement.
60. In addition, the Constitution of the Center reflects the provision of the Agreement to the effect that “the Government shall make available to the Centre the administrative staff necessary for the performance of its functions”.
61. However, neither the constitution of the Center nor the Staff Rules and Regulations provide clear indications about the degree of autonomy granted to the management of the Center for fixing the number and quality or choosing and hiring the executive staff.

D. The Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:

In view of the significance of the RCQE to UNESCO and vice-versa, and the tremendous support provided to the Center by the Government of KSA and its ensuing potential in advancing UNESCO educational agenda in the Arab Region, the evaluator recommends that the Agreement between the Government of the KSA and UNESCO on the operation of RCQE as UNESCO Category 2 Centre be renewed with due regard to the improvements in the functioning of the Center as recommended below.

However, UNESCO may wish to make the renewal conditional to the presentation by the Center of an operational plan for the fulfilment of the recommendations below, particularly as regards the staffing of the Center (Recommendation 2), visibility of the Center's achievements and its transformation into a real regional hub for quality education and excellence in the Arab region (Recommendations 3 and 4), development and adoption of a clear communication strategy with all relevant stakeholders (Recommendation 5), closer alignment of its programs with SDG4 ERs and UNESCO education programme in the Arab region, and widening its regional reach (Recommendation 6).

RECOMMENDATION 2:

In view of the sustainable financial resources available to the Center from the Government of KSA, the evaluator recommends the revision of the staffing table of the Center in such a way to reinforce its institutional capacity by hiring additional stable high-level professional staff to monitor the implementation of the studies and researches commissioned by the Center to outside parties, carry out the dissemination of these researches and studies according to the mechanisms set out in Recommendations 3, and 4 below, and perform the duties necessary for the fulfilment of the actions proposed in recommendations 5, 6 and 7 below.

To this effect, the detailed organizational structure proposed in the "Operational Plan 2019-2021" needs to be revised in order to ensure optimal functioning of the Center, including for the implementation of this plan, with clear demarcations between the positions and detailed descriptions of the duties and responsibilities of each specialized position².

At the same time, the Government of KSA should clarify the ways and means it intends to fulfill its commitment, as spelled out in the Agreement, to "make available to the Centre the administrative staff necessary for the performance of its functions", including the technical staff, either by secondment or by providing an annual grant sufficient to hire the necessary administrative and technical staff as would be approved by the Governing Board.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

In order to enhance the visibility of the Center's work and to contribute to transforming the Center into a real "hub of quality and excellence in education expertise in the Arab States" as set in its objectives³, in addition to presenting and discussing the results of the studies and researches realized within the framework of the Center in regional workshops, the evaluator recommends that these studies and researches be proof-read and edited, and their full texts published electronically (and on paper if so deem appropriate) with the usual bibliographic information (author's name; title of the work; location of publication; publisher, i.e. the Center; date of publication; ISBN; copyright; etc.), with an extensive informative summary in English.

² For example, instead of having only administrative staff, the Center may want to consider having in its organizational structure the following specialists: teacher policies and training specialist; learning and curriculum specialist; governance and excellence specialist; partnerships and fund-raising specialist; publication specialist; media and communication specialist; etc.

³ An example of such a hub is the website of the National Council on Teacher Quality (<https://www.nctq.org/>) which provides information on very wide array of issues concerning teachers and teacher quality in the USA.

The hub should also include useful practical information about the prizes awarded for excellence in education in the Arab States revealed by the study that has been realized by the Center in this field, with future expansion as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

In order to make the research and studies realized within the framework of the Center available to education researchers, practitioners, and students throughout the Arab Region and beyond, the evaluator recommends that an agreement be concluded between the Center and the Arab Educational Information Network (Shamaa), a database equivalent to ERIC in the Arab Region, to make Shamaa, who enjoys an association agreement with UNESCO, index the full RCQE education substantive texts and provide free of charge online access to these texts.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

In order to strengthen and widen its links with various quality education stakeholders in the Arab States, the evaluator recommends that the Center develop an appropriate communication strategy with UNESCO national commissions and a definite networking strategy with other educational entities and scholars in the Arab States, including through appropriate social media, to enhance the visibility of RCQE mandate and activities, reinforce the exchange of knowledge, technical and policy information, and best practices in the field of education quality and excellence among institutions and individuals, and seek valuable feedback from stakeholders across these States, including from its own Advisory Committee, and have, at the Center, dedicated media and communication staff to apply the strategy in a sustainable manner.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

In order to better contribute to the fulfilment of UNESCO's education agenda in the Arab region and to the achievement of SDG4 ERs, the evaluator recommends the following:

- (a) The RCQE implement the already envisaged assessment of its performance against the KPIs developed in its Master Strategy and profit from the lessons to be learnt from this assessment to improve its future actions;
- (b) Based on the results of this assessment, make any necessary updating or amendments to its Master Strategy and operational plan for 2019-2021 providing more balance and synergy between the various modalities of action generally adopted within UNESCO, i.e. (i) research and foresight, (ii) standard setting, (iii) advocacy and awareness raising, (iv) capacity building, (v) publication, and (vi) catalyst for regional cooperation;
- (c) Align its programs and activities in an innovative futuristic way to the 40 C/5 ERs most relevant to quality education, particularly ER1 (quality ECCE and general education), ER5 (quality teacher policies and training programs), ER6 (life skills education), and ER8 (inclusive education);
- (d) Reinforce its regional action and coordination with the various stakeholders, and more specifically the ministries of education in the Arab States, UNESCO offices and centers in the Arab region, relevant UNESCO divisions at HQs and other institutes and centers, ALECSO, ISESCO, ABEGS, and the NGOs concerned with education quality in the Arab region⁴.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

In order to intensify its productivity in the various functions it is called to perform, the Center may want to play a more active role in mobilizing extrabudgetary resources and include in its staffing table a staff member dedicated to fund raising.

⁴ The Center may also want to envisage enhancing its regional character by opening leading positions to regional candidates.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

In order to enhance the contribution of the Centre to UNESCO's education programme and priorities, including as regards the contribution to the achievement of the SDG4 ERs, to ensure the quality and relevance of its training activities, and to assist it towards the attainment of the objectives for which it was established, the evaluator recommends that UNESCO reinforces its links and support to RCQE and continues to associate it in a sustainable manner with the actions of its offices and centers in the Arab Region at all stages of the planning and implementation cycles, in such a way that the activities of the Center become an integral part of UNESCO's education program in the Region.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

The parties may want to consider embedding into the objectives of the Center (Article 7 of the Agreement) a clear reference that the Center would seek in all its programmes and activities to contribute to the achievement of SDG4.

Annex 1
Text of the Agreement

Annex 2
2020 Evaluation for the Renewal of the
Regional Center of Quality and Excellence in Education (RCQE) as a Category 2 Centre
under the auspices of UNESCO
TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Background

Category 2 institutes and centres under the auspices of UNESCO are a global network of institutions of excellence in the Organization's domains of competence. Given their expertise, they contribute in a meaningful way to the implementation of UNESCO's priorities, programmes and global development agendas during a defined period, through international and regional cooperation, research, knowledge production, policy advice, and capacity enhancement. Although independent of UNESCO, category 2 institutes and centres are a privileged partner of the Organization with access to UNESCO's logo, international and intergovernmental bodies and networks, and may leverage UNESCO's international reach and convening powers. Category 2 institutes and centres under the auspices of UNESCO are an integral part of the Organization's Comprehensive Partnership Strategy.

The Regional Center of Quality and Excellence in Education (RCQE) was established a category 2 centre under the auspices of UNESCO by the General Conference at its 37th session in 2013 upon proposal from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Agreement on the establishment of RCQE was subsequently signed by the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and UNESCO on 21 October 2014 and expires on 20 October 2020. In order to renew the agreement, an evaluation of the centre must be carried out in conformity with the [Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO \(2019\)](#), and presented to the Executive Board for consideration.

The RCQE aims to disseminate a culture of quality and excellence in educational systems through developing policies based on the best international experiences and research finding in this field. It also develops training programmes promoting the awareness and developing capacities in this area in the Arab States. RCQE particularly cooperates with the UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut on regional projects or programmes focusing on research, consultation and training to ensure the right to education for all and quality and excellence in education at national, regional and international levels within the framework of SDG 4 – Education 2030.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to examine whether the status of RCQE as a category 2 centre under the auspices of UNESCO can be renewed. The following parameters shall be considered by the independent expert responsible for conducting the evaluation:

- (i) The extent to which the Centre's objectives as set out in the agreement signed with UNESCO were achieved
- (ii) The relevance of the contribution of the Centre's programmes and activities to the achievement of UNESCO's prevailing Approved Programme and Budget (C/5) at the time in which it was designated, including global strategies and action plans as well as sectoral programme priorities, as defined in the agreement

- (iii) The relevance of the contribution of the activities of the Centre to global development agendas
- (iv) The quality of coordination and interaction with UNESCO, both at Headquarters and in the field, as well as with National Commissions, other thematically related category 1 and 2 institutes or centres with regard to planning and implementation of programmes
- (v) The partnerships developed and maintained with government agencies, public or private partners and donors
- (vi) The nature and efficiency of the Centre’s governance, including organizational arrangements, management, human resources and accountability mechanisms
- (vii) The financial and human resources available for ensuring sustainable institutional capacity and viability
- (viii) The extent to which the Centre enjoys within its territory the autonomy necessary for the execution of its activities and legal capacity to contract, institute legal proceedings, and to acquire and dispose of movable and immovable property

The independent expert shall also make recommendations, as appropriate, on how the Centre can reinforce its contribution to UNESCO’s programme. It shall also assess the extent to which the provisions of the current agreement need to be updated in order to conform to SDG 4 – Education 2030, the provisions of the model in the Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres (2019) and take into consideration the recommendations of the evaluation report. UNESCO is responsible for the overall preparation of the agreement.

The conclusions of the evaluation will be shared with RCQE and Saudi Arabia and the report made available on the Education Sector’s website.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

UNESCO’s Education Sector, through its Regional Office in Beirut, is responsible for the management of the evaluation and contracting the independent expert in accordance with its rules and regulations. In consultation with the global coordination focal point, it shall draft the terms of reference of the evaluation and select the independent expert who shall be responsible for conducting the evaluation and preparing the report. The category 2 centre or the Member State concerned shall cover all costs related to the evaluation.

The conclusions of the evaluation will be shared with the category 2 centre and Member State concerned and the report made available on the Education Sector’s website. The evaluation should be reviewed by UNESCO’s Intersectoral Review Committee and serve as the basis for the Director-General’s recommendation to the Executive Board as to whether the Agreement between UNESCO and the Government of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia should be renewed for a maximum period of eight years. It should be noted that once the renewal of the designation and the agreement are approved by the Executive Board, the terms of the draft agreement may no longer be modified.

4. Independent Expert – Qualifications

The evaluation will be conducted by one independent expert whom the UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut will select based on the following qualifications:

Mandatory qualifications:

- At least 10 years of professional experience in the field of education, with a special focus on quality and excellence in education
- Academic degree (PhD preferred) related to the above-mentioned field
- At least 7 years of professional experience in policy and programme evaluation, some of which in the context of quality and excellence in education
- Fluency in English (written and spoken, excellent capacity to produce written material in an analytical and succinct manner)
- Having had no prior affiliation with the Centre under review, and no previous involvement in the design or implementation of any of the activities under review.

Desirable qualifications:

- Knowledge of the role and mandate of UNESCO and its programmes in education
- Knowledge of the UN system and/or other international organizations
- Working knowledge of Arabic (spoken)
- Understanding and application of UN mandates in human rights and gender equality.

5. Background Documents

The Centre will make the following documents available to the independent expert:

- Strategy for Category 2 institutes centres under the auspices of UNESCO (2019), contained in document 40 C/79 and its annexes
- A copy of the existing agreement between the Member State and UNESCO establishing the centre
- Annual progress reports and biennial self-assessment reports on the contribution to UNESCO's programme objectives
- Periodic independent audit reports of the financial statements
- List of staff
- List of key publications
- List of donors and project partners
- Minutes of the meetings of the Governing Body of the Centre
- Support provided to Member States
- Available audit and evaluation reports
- Available information on future activities

6. Methodology

The review of the Centre will include:

- A desk study of relevant documents, provided by the Centre and UNESCO Secretariat;
- Interviews with the Centre's management and staff (telephone, online and/or via e-mail)
- Interviews (telephone, online and/or via e-mail) with the Centre's stakeholders (including implementing partners, beneficiaries as well as UNESCO staff at Headquarters, UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut and elsewhere)
- Preparation of the evaluation report

Kindly note that no on-site visits are planned due to the current COVID-19 situation worldwide.

7. Deliverables

The evaluation is estimated to require 15 professional working days for one senior level consultant from 15th May to 4th June 2020. The independent evaluator is expected to deliver a draft review report and a final review report.

(i) Draft evaluation executive summary (2-3 pages, due 1st June 2020)

A draft executive summary shall be submitted in English. The process for preparing the draft executive summary shall allow adequate time for discussion and validation of the findings and the recommendations that have been proposed with the relevant UNESCO programme sector and pertinent stakeholders, including the government(s) that proposed the designation of the Centre and the Centre itself.

(ii) Draft and Final evaluation report (maximum 10 pages, excluding the Executive summary and annexes, due 4th June 2020)

The final report on the evaluation should be structured as follows:

- Executive summary including recommendations (maximum 2 pages)
- Purpose of the review (maximum 0.5 -1 pages)
- Scope of the review (maximum 0.5-1 page)
- Methodology (maximum 1-2 pages)
- Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions, including an assessment of the centre against each criteria of Strategy and a formal recommendation on the continuation of the category 2 status, (around 6 pages – core part of the report)
- Annexes (including interview list, key documents consulted, Terms of Reference)

The language of the report will be English.

Annex 3

List of Principal Documents Consulted

- Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the Auspices of UNESCO (2019).
- Agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and UNESCO regarding the Establishment of the Regional Center for Quality and Excellence in Education (RCQE) as a Category 2 Centre under the Auspices of UNESCO.
- UNESCO 38 C5 (2016-2017)
- UNESCO 39 C5 (2018-2019)
- UNESCO 40 C5 (2020-2021)
- RCQE Constitution
- RCQE Administrative Affairs Rules and Regulations
- Website of the Center (encompassing 21 entries):
<http://rcqe.org/en/>
- RCQE Master Strategy Plan 2015-2019:
<http://rcqe.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Strategy-English.pdf>
- 2019-2021 RCQE Executive Plan
- Several documents downloaded from the web, concerning particularly media coverage of the activities of the Center.
- Agenda of the third meeting of the Governing Board, Paris, 31 October 2017
(34 documents attached):
[/http://rcqe.org/3rd-board](http://rcqe.org/3rd-board)
- Agenda of the fourth meeting of the Governing Board, Riyadh, 18 October 2018
(29 documents attached):
[/http://rcqe.org/4th-board](http://rcqe.org/4th-board)
- Agenda of the fifth meeting of the Governing Board, Paris, 29 December 2019
(27 documents attached):
[/http://rcqe.org/5th-board](http://rcqe.org/5th-board)
- The agendas of the Governing Board meetings have generally included the following topics:
 - Report on previous achievements;
 - Financial Report of the previous year;
 - Draft Budget for the following year;
 - Summaries of the Projects Completed;
 - Projects Proposed for the following Year;
 - Seminars Proposed for the following Year;
 - Financial Rules and Regulations;

- Administrative Rules and Regulations;
- Procurement Rules and Regulations;
- RCQE Constitution;
- RCQE Master Strategy Plan 2015-2019

Annex 4

List of Persons interviewed

RCQE:

1. Dr. Abdelrahman Almedaires
Director
2. Dr. Ali Suliman
Knowledge Management Officer

RCQE Governing Board

1. Dr. Henri Awit
Director General, Arab Thought Foundation
2. Dr. Hamad Al-Hammami
Director, UNEDBAS

RCQE Scientific Committee

3. Dr. Abdelsalam Al-Joufi
Former Minister of Education, Yemen
4. Dr. John C. Weidman II
Professor Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh

UNESCO Staff Members:

1. Mr. Hamad Al-Hammami
Director, UNEDBAS
2. Mr. Higazi IDRIS
Programme Specialist, UNEDBAS

Implementers:

1. Dr. Nada Mneinmeh
Former President of the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies
2. Dr. Ghassan Issa
Director, Arab Network for Early Childhood Care and Development (ANECD)

Other Stakeholders:

Ms. Rita Maalouf
Executive Director, Arab Educational Information Network (Shamaa)

Annex 5
Interview topics addressed to the various stakeholders

1. Governing Board Members, Scientific Committee and UNESCO Staff:

- A. What are in your opinion the strengths of the Center? What are the factors that have made these strengths happen?
- B. What are in your opinion the weaknesses from which the Center has suffered or still suffer? What are the factors that have led to these weaknesses? Is the management of the Center aware of these weaknesses? Is the management able to address these weaknesses in the short or medium term?
- C. What are your expectations concerning the Center's future role and the programs, projects, and activities it should undertake, and the procedures it should implement in order to perform its role in the best way?
- D. Do you have any other suggestions that would guide the assessment of the Center for its potential renewal as Category 2 Center under the auspices of UNESCO?

2. Implementers

- A. As implementer of one of the activities undertaken by the Arab Network for Early Childhood Care and Development (ANECD) on behalf of the Regional Center for Quality and Excellence in Education, how do you assess the relationship between the Center and the Network? What are the positive aspects shown in this relationship? Did you confront any difficulties or negative aspects?
- B. Did the research funded by the Center be completed as planned? What are the tangible outputs of it (report; book; online publication; etc.)?
- C. Have these outputs been shared with education stakeholders? How?
- D. Have these outputs been used in the improvement of education locally or regionally?
- E. Do you think that the Center can play a significant role in the development of education in the Arab countries? How could it perform this function?
- F. Do you have any other suggestions that would guide the assessment of the Center for its potential renewal as Category 2 Center under the auspices of UNESCO?

3. The Arab Educational Information Network (Shamaa):

- A. Do you have an agreement with the Regional Center for Quality and Excellence in Education based in KSA for indexing its educational outputs in your database? If yes, what is the volume of the publications indexed?
- B. If you don't have such an agreement, did you have any contact with the management of the Center to this effect? If yes, why these contacts didn't lead to an agreement?