

**Education System in the Islamic Republic of IRAN**

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1-Introduction:

Education background in Iran dates back to several centuries B.C. Dynamic culture and civilization of Iran in the Sassanid era reached its climax, while even higher education was amazingly flourishing.

Higher education centres in Riv Ardestir and Jondi Shapour cities, remaining from 241 years B.C. up to the present time, are deep-seated evidence for the above claim.

After Islam, in the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries, scientific centres were established and highly developed. Centres such as Ologh Beik “history field” observatory, Rashidi table and even Textile engineering school and libraries are examples of such flourish.

After this scientific-educational peak, Iran experienced a long stagnancy, lasting till recent years. During the years 1965 to 1979, some attention was attracted to quantity and quality of education in different levels, along with the government’s attempt to expand universities and pre-college education and illiteracy eradication. Like other state plans, educational programmes which were a version of Western, specially American systems of education, were not very successful. This is particularly due to the fact that, the above system of education was implemented only for a short period.

Islamic Revolution lead to an overall revision of Iran’s education system. After the Revolution and the demise of Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, major changes occurred in all the levels of education, which modifications are being continued.
The following is a general scheme of the education systems in Iran, presented simply and concisely.

2- Educational System in Iran:

Educational system in Iran, like in other countries, falls into three majors categories:

1. General Education (pre-university)
2. Higher Education
3. Special Education

2-1 General Education

Following the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 the former philosophy, policy, strategies, and the goals of educational system were essentially revised. The Council of Fundamental Change in Education took the responsibility of this revision under the Higher Council of Cultural Revolution’s supervision.

To achieve its long-term objectives in the education sector, the Islamic Republic of Iran has designed and performed five-year plans based on the quantitative extension of education and the qualitative promotion of the educational system. Specifically, the future objectives of education include:

- Strengthening ethics, virtue, equity, social justice, democracy and international understanding
- Creating educational programmes to protect against cultural invasion and to strengthen morality
- Eradicating illiteracy, extending education for all, and expanding formal education from pre-school to university level
- Strengthening the research system, organizing research councils (national and provincial), and establishing research centres in the country
- Strengthening teachers' training centres, teacher training universities, and the instructor training university in the higher education system
- Raising public contribution in the education system and establishing non-profit schools

However, a number of crucial problems, obstacles and difficulties face the Ministry of Education, including:

- the rapid quantitative growth of the upper secondary students: at present the annual growth rate is 16.3%.
- with regard to the implementation of the reformed secondary education system, the main problems are providing facilities and equipment, and training the teachers
- research shortages of all educational levels.
- responding to the demands for upper secondary education in underprivileged areas.
- Lack of motivation of young people to join the teaching profession.
- Low motivation of teachers
- Use of traditional instructional methods.

2-2 Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Second Five-year Development Plan (1995-1999) put a special emphasis on the provision of free education and facilities for compulsory education. According to Article 30 of the Constitution, the government is obliged to provide free education for all.

According to the Note No. 62 of the Second Development Plan, the State is obliged to provide necessary devices and facilities to make it compulsory for school age children and illiterates under 40 years to attend obligatory education and literacy courses respectively.

According to Article 11 of the executive regulation of the above Note, approved by the Cabinet on June 16, 1996, the Ministry of Education, with the assistance of the Literacy Movement Organization, is obliged to announce the list of the regions which will be covered the year after by compulsory education of school
age children as well as the illiterate group every year in March, so that all school age children and above-mentioned illiterate adults become literate by the end of Second Five-year Plan.

According to Articles 10 and 11 of principles governing the education system, general education (up to the end of lower secondary school) is compulsory and free of charge for all. Compulsory education currently lasts five years (primary education) and caters for 6- to 10-years-olds. According to the Second Five-year Development Plan, compulsory education will increase to eight years, covering the 6 to 13 year old age group (primary and lower secondary levels).

The Act regarding the establishment of non-profit schools was approved by the Islamic Parliament on 25 May 1988. Non-profit schools are established and managed through people’s participation.

In addition to what is presented in the Constitution, the rules and decrees related to the Ministry of Education are approved by the Islamic Parliament, the Cabinet and Higher Council of Education. Some of the main decrees and acts approved during the last three years are as follows: the Act of Co-operation (1992) of the Ministry of Education with other Ministries and Organization through which extension of education to other Ministries and using the facilities of other organizations became possible. Also, the Note No. 8 of the Budget Act (1996) grants more financial resources to the Ministry of Education. The Act of Establishing Adults Schools and Exemplary Public Schools (1993) have facilitated education for all and made people participate in education. The Bill on Education Council Formation, approved on 24 December 1993, not only encourages public participation but also decentralizes the educational administration to some extent.

2-3 Structure and organization of the pre-university education system

The structure and organization of the pre-university education system include 3 major stages:

- Pre-primary education
- Primary education
- Secondary education
2-3-1 Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education is a one-year period in which 5-year-olds are prepared for the primary stage. The main objectives of pre-primary education (kindergarten) are as follows:

- To contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and social growth in young children, based on religious and ethical principles;
- To develop the abilities and talents of children in order to prepare them for future studies;
- To prepare children to easily comprehend scientific concepts;
- To promote the Persian language, particularly in the provinces where different languages are spoken;
- To prepare children for social relationships and co-operation;
- To help families with low incomes by creating a safe educational atmosphere to train their young children.

2-3-2 Primary education

Primary education lasts five years and caters for pupils aged 6-10. The main objectives of primary education are as follows:

- Creating a favourable atmosphere for the moral and religious development of pupils;
- Developing pupils’ talents and creative abilities;
- Developing pupils’ physical strength;
- Enabling the pupils to read, write and improve their calculating skills, and providing necessary training on proper social behaviours;
- Instruction for individual hygiene.

The study plan for primary education is shown in the table below:


<table>
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<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of weekly teaching periods</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Quran</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persian Composition</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dictation</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persian (reading and comprehension)</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts (painting, calligraphy, workmanship)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene and Natural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total weekly periods** 24 24 24 24 24

All subjects and textbooks for primary education are decided upon and prepared at central level. It is compulsory to pass all the above subjects to be admitted to the next grade. There is final examination at the end of grade 5 administered at regional and provincial levels. The successful completion of the primary level leads to the certificate of completed primary level studies.

The average drop-out rate for the primary level in 1993-94 was 1.9% for grade 2, 4.1% for grade 3, 6.5% for grade 4, and 8.7% for grade 5. The rate of transition from primary to lower secondary education was 94.2% in the school year 1994-95.

In 1995-96, the average number of pupils per class was 29.5 and the average pupil-teacher ratio was 31.6:1.

*It could be useful to include some additional information concerning:*
- The gross enrolment ratio.

2-3-3 Secondary education

The main aims of lower secondary education are as follows:

- Developing the students' moral and intellectual abilities;

- Increasing the students' experiences and general knowledge;

- Helping students to continue the habits of discipline and scientific imagination which have been taught in primary school;

- Diagnosing individual preferences and talents in students so that they may be directed towards suitable studies and professions.

The lower secondary curriculum is shown in the following table:
## Study plan for lower secondary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of weekly periods in each grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persian language and literature</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic language</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to techniques and vocation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense preparation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Quran</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total weekly periods</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religious minority groups have their own specific teaching and there is a special appendix for the Sunnite. It is compulsory to pass all the above subjects in the different lower secondary grades. Teaching is done in Persian at all levels (in bilingual regions, a one-month course is held to teach key concepts of the language to beginners, before the school year begins). There is a final examination at the end of grade 3 administered at regional and provincial levels. Successful completion of the lower secondary level leads to the certificate of completed lower secondary level studies.

The average repetition rate for the lower secondary level in 1993-1994 was 11.37% for grade 1, 10.24% for grade 2, and 12.67% for grade 3. The rate of transition from lower secondary to upper secondary education was 98% in the school...
year 1994-95. The average number of pupils per class for 1995-96 was 32.1 and the average pupil-teacher ratio was 30.6:1.

Upper secondary education is for students graduating from lower secondary schools who enter the three-year secondary school according to their aptitudes and potentials. The courses offered at the upper secondary level are organized in the following branches:

*Theoretical course:* the aim of this course is to promote general and cultural knowledge, to identify students’ aptitudes and attitudes, and to provide proper ground to guide them into one of the many areas of secondary education and prepare them to be able to enter the universities. Pupils have about 63 units in common while the remaining 36 units are divided specifically among the Mathematics-Physics course and the Literature and Human Science course. There is a final examination administered nationwide and successful students are awarded a diploma. Graduates can take a one-year pre-university course.

*Vocational and Technical Branch:* the technical-vocational branch consists of three fields: technical, agricultural and vocational. There are currently 30 fields in technical and vocational education. The aim of the course, in addition to promoting general knowledge and culture and identifying aptitude and attitude of pupils, is to guide them to continue their studies in applied science courses. About 60 of the 96 units are common in different areas and the other 36 units vary among industry courses, agriculture courses and service courses. Qualified students of TVE courses can also enter the institutions offering technician degree programmes or pre-university courses, and others get first or second grade skill certificates according to their fields of study.

*Kar-Danesh (knowledge-skill) Branch:* the Kar-Danesh branch includes 400 skills. Each of them has its own syllabus which is developed and is available at the Under-secretary of Secondary Education. The educational process in the Kar-Danesh branch is different from the other branches. It is competency-based, education is rather individual, and a modular education method is applied. The aim of this course is to produce semi-skilled and skilled workers, foremen and supervisors. Pupils can get their second degree skill certificate (i.e. National Skill Standard II) after they have passed 32 units of skill modules. They can get their first-degree skill certificates (i.e.
National Skill Standard 1) after passing 48-units of skill modules. They can also get their diploma in the same field provided they can pass 48 units of general subjects.

Pre-university course: the aim of this course is to prepare pupils to enter the universities, if they can pass 32 units according to their fields of study. The programme lasts one academic year. The curriculum is based on the secondary school curriculum and takes into account the requirements at the higher education level. It is prepared and approved by the Medical Education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for administering the pre-university programme. Upon completion of the pre-university program, the graduates who are interested in entering a two-year associate course do not have to pass the pre-university programme, provided they meet the other requirements.

Integrated associate degree in technical / vocational stream: this is contemplated as a five-year course after lower secondary to train technicians. The students of this stream have the option after three years to opt for pre-university or other courses.

At the upper secondary level, the curriculum consists of three kinds of subjects and courses: general/common subjects which are common for all fields and branches, elective subjects and special subjects which are specific for each field or branch.

Foreign language teachning includes either English, French, or German. All upper secondary students should pass four elective units. Girls are exempt from the general required subject called Defence Preparation. They have, however, to replace it by passing one of the elective or special required units of other branches. Students belonging to religious minority groups are exempt from passing Quran, which is a general required subject. They have, however, to pass the same number of other elective or special required units of other branches.

Upon successful completion of the upper secondary level, students in theoretical, technical and vocational, or Kar-Danesh education receive the High School Diploma. Passing 32 out of 96 units of skill subjects, Kar-Danesh students get a Certificate for Grade 2 Skill Standards. Passing 48 out of 96 units of skill subjects, Kar-Danesh students get a Certificate for Grade 1 Skill Standard. The transition rate
from upper secondary to post-secondary level or universities (private and public) was 40% in the school year 1994-95.

The average number of pupils per class in upper secondary education for 1995-96 was 29.8 and the average student-teacher ratio was 29.

- Supervising the administration of the affairs of the non-profit schools and institutions and providing required facilities according to the related rules and regulations.
- Forming committees for investigating clerical offences of the personnel throughout the province according to related criteria.
- Studying and confirming the budget proposed by the offices of regions, cities and districts and sending it to the related offices according to approved rules and criteria.
- Providing suitable grounds for organizing provincial and regional councils of education in the province and subordinated cities and regions according to the existing instructions.

The main functions and duties of the Office of Education in regions and districts are as follows:

- Establishing, equipping and managing the educational establishments of the city, region and district, including pre-primary, primary, junior high schools, high schools, pre-university colleges and Kar-Danesh (knowledge-skill) institutions as well as adult schools and private institutions.
- Encouraging and guiding people to establish schools through their own contributions.
- Supervising the activities of the principals of the institutions to fulfil the objectives of the Ministry of Education properly.
- Supervising the activities concerning manpower training, Shahed schools (special schools for martyrs’ children), exemplary public schools and devotees’ schools according to related instructions.
- Supervising the activities of Parents-Teachers Associations and of the Red Crescent Organization for the youth.
- Supervising the activities of cultural centres.
2-2 Higher education:

Higher education institutions include universities, junior colleges, colleges and higher education centres, which require a high school diploma in either the general or technical/vocational branch and succeeding in the entrance examination. Universities include the following groups:

- General (or comprehensive) universities in which all educational groups are taught.
- Specialized universities in which only one of the following seven fields of study is taught: humanities, basic sciences, applied sciences, medicine, engineering, art, agriculture and veterinary.
- The Comprehensive Technology University, which has been founded for applied sciences studies.
- Paym-e-nour University (distance university);
- Azad Islamic (established in 1984), which offers courses at all levels in sciences, mathematics, medical science, engineering, etc. It is primarily intended to offer courses for adults who want to upgrade their skills. Providing pre- and in- service training for teachers has been a main concern of this university. It has 480,000 students in its 80 branches.
- Medical universities.

The total number of students in public universities and other post-secondary educational institutions in 1998-99 was 638,913, out of which 267,844 were studying humanities, 92,379 basic sciences, 38,112 agriculture and veterinary, 120,800 engineering, 97,826 medicine, and 21,952 arts. The total number of students in the governmental and non-governmental higher education sector (Azad University) together with the associate courses of the State Organization for Administration and Employment Affairs Teacher Training Centres, and students studying abroad in 1998-99 was about 15,000,001.

In all higher education institutions, education is based on the credit system. The number of units necessary to get a B.A./B.Sc. degree is 142 to 146 units (full-time basis), corresponding to around four years of study. M.A./M.Sc. degree programmes are available for bachelor's degree holders and are subject to an entrance exam. The student who passes 13 general and 38 to 45 specific units, prepares a thesis (dissertation) and defends it successfully in the advisory committee, gets a certificate.
(generally after two years of study). Ph.D. is the highest educational level. It is divided into two educational and research phases: M.A./M.Sc. holders who succeed in the entrance exam start the educational phase of this course. They must pass 12-30 units and a comprehensive (or qualification) exam, after which they enter the research phase. In this phase, they prepare a thesis and defend it to get a Ph.D. degree certificate. It should be mentioned that doctorates in medical and specialized fields of study are not included in the above regulations and have their own special regulations.

The Ministry of science, Research and Technology is responsible for all non-medical groups. The medical and paramedical groups (except for the veterinary group) are under their responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, as required by law. Decision-making on the policies of higher education is practiced through the Islamic Parliament, the Cabinet, the Higher Council of Cultural Revolution, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

According to law, the administration of universities and other higher education institutions is undertaken by the boards of trustees, whose duties include the ratification of the official organization, approval of the suggested budget, confirmation of the financial and transactional regulations, suggesting the range for faculty members’ allowance, determining the range of research fees, teaching fees, wages and authors’ fees, ratifying employment regulations for faculty members, and attracting private sector’s aid and local incomes.

The board of trustees are suggested by one of the mentioned ministries, endorsed by the Higher Council of Cultural Revolution, and appointed by a decree issued by the related minister.

The educational council of universities and other higher education institutions is formed by the members of the administrative body and the deans of faculties, junior colleges and research departments and a number of faculty teachers, supervised by the board of trustees. Some of the duties of this council are to study and approve the short-term educational and research projects, new educational courses for fields and suggesting them to the related ministry.
Universities and higher education and research institutions of the two ministries of Science, Research and Technology and of Health and Medical Education have independent codes in the general budget of the mentioned ministries, and thus are financially independent.

In order to evaluate the educational and administrative quality of universities and higher education institutions, the two ministries of Science, Research and Technology and Health and Medical Education have independent codes in the general budget of the mentioned ministries, and thus are financially independent.

In order to evaluate the educational and administrative quality of universities and higher education institutions, the two ministries of Science, Research and Technology and Health and Medical Education have a council called the Supervision Council and an Education Department. Evaluation include management, application of educational laws and regulations, quality of education and research projects, educational and research space and facilities, and welfare, sports and cultural facilities. The social, political, scientific and cultural atmosphere dominating the university and the services given by the institution to other institutions of the region are also taken into account.

Fig (1) shows the structure, age of students and the length of studies in different level of education.

2-3 Special education:

Special education includes both the education of handicapped students and that of gifted students. The establishments for the handicapped include day schools and boarding schools. In addition, some students are educated either in classes held in ordinary schools or in normal schools using itinerant teachers. In the academic year 1995-96, there were 2,902 handicapped students studying in 20 boarding schools, mostly including the blind, the deaf, physically disabled, or multi-handicapped.

At the primary level, different groups of handicapped students receive different kinds of education. The special schools’ curriculum which is currently conducted at a pilot phase includes studying the Quran, religious teaching, Persian
composition, dictation, reading (reading comprehension and grammar), social studies, mathematics, natural sciences and hygiene, arts and physical education for all groups. In addition, skill learning is taught to mentally retarded and behaviourally disordered students, rehabilitation activity (physiotherapy, speech therapy, counselling, social work and work therapy) to physically disabled students, pronunciation, lip-reading correction, and hearing training to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, Braille learning and mobility and direction finding to blind and partially-sighted students.

Subject matters and working hours of special schools at the lower and upper secondary level (except in specific situations) are exactly the same as ordinary schools. For mentally retarded students, a two-year vocational training course is held, the objective of which is to acquire needed vocational skills and develop competencies in order to prepare them for a relatively independent life and for accepting individual and social responsibilities.

The Special Education Organization has been taking measures to diagnose and place handicapped children all over the country.

The National Organization for Nurturing Outstanding Talents is responsible for the education of gifted students. The organization is run under the supervision of the board of trustees and associate with the Ministry of Education. A total of 83 centers have been established for the education of the gifted in different cities of the country up to 1995. In addition to the curriculum and textbooks of general education, supplementary books for religious knowledge, mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology have been developed which are added to the above-mentioned books as part of the curriculum. Work-oriented courses are held in special occasions.

The pupils of grade 5 of primary schools whose average of the fourth grade is more than 19/20 can, every year, take part in the entrance exam of the junior high schools in the cities where the Organization has junior high schools. The students of the third grade of the junior high schools whose average of the second grade is more than 18.5/20 can sit the entrance exam of upper secondary schools in the cities in which the organization has high schools. Related figures are presented below:

3- Private education:
The under-secretary of Public Participation in the Ministry of Education is responsible for private education. Non-profit schools work under the supervision of this under-secretary. The Act regarding the establishment of non-profit schools was approved by the Islamic Parliament on 25 May 1998.

Non-profit schools are based on the objectives, criteria, curriculum, textbooks, exams and regulations of the Ministry of Education and are under the supervision of the Ministry. The founder(s) must have a number of qualifications, including belief in Islam, Iranian nationality, to be married and not associated with the previous regime, to be experienced in educational affairs, and to have at least an upper secondary diploma (or its associate degree in an Islamic school). The Supervision Council is the authority in charge of the inspection and investigation of the qualifications of the founder(s). The financial resources of the school include tuition fees and aids received from parents and charitable people and organizations. At present there are non-profit schools at the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels. Some of the non-profit schools may include extra-curricular activities in addition to the regular programmes. Enrolment of students in these schools is done through payment of fees determined by the Ministry of Education annually. Some schools hold entrance exams for the students to be enrolled.

4- Administration and management of the education system:

The Ministry of Education is responsible for pre-university education.

The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology is responsible for universities of science, art, and technology. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education deals with medical schools and the training of medical assistants. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is responsible for non-formal training. Non-formal vocational courses are conducted by the Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO) of this ministry.

Specialized higher education institutions are under the control of various ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Petroleum, Ministry of Industry, etc. They organize courses and award diplomas in various specializations in agreement with the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education. At present, the
Applied Scientific University is responsible for setting co-ordination between these ministries to train manpower as required.

**Fig (1): Structure, age of students, and the length of studies in different levels of education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<td>6</td>
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**Source: Ministry of Education 1998**

**Concluding Remarks:**

In this summarized report, the basis of education system for different levels in the Islamic Republic of Iran has been depicted. Despite the Iran’s rapid population growth in recent years, the 8-year imposed war of Iraq against Iran and economic restrictions and so forth, our country has taken important steps in education in all levels. Today, almost all children who need to be educated, including girls and boys, have access to cost-free education, the level of public literacy has significantly been
raised, and the percentage of illiterates in the country has considerably been decreased. The number of the literate, up to 35 years of age, has been increased to 97%. The related organizations have notably been successful in lowering the percentage of illiterates in the country, so that they have been honored international awards by UNESCO several times.

In higher education, we have experienced a thorough growth in the number of students in all scientific and educational levels. Furthermore, two points are worth mentioning:
- The rapid growth in the girls’ admission to the higher education institutes of the country. At present, more than 50% of universities and higher education institutions’ admissions are girls (this year: about 54%);
- Special attention which is paid to establishment and expansion of advanced and post-graduate courses.

In the field of research, many fruitful steps has been taken and the allocated budget has been multiplied. Despite all the efforts carried out and circumstances existed in education and research in Iran, in last few years; we are still far away from developed countries and the requirements of a developed country, focusing on science and technology. Such a distance will be decreased through a full-scale attempt and attention.

The important point here is that, educational development in the country, as well as reaching to the standards of developed countries in scientific and educational fields requires more collaboration among scientific and research centres, specially in the region.

We hopefully expect that such collaborations will be expanded more.