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Bureaucratic Policies and Patronage Politics

Prospects and Challenges of Private Higher Education in Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, private higher education has been rapidly expanding in Afghanistan. The expansion as demonstrated by numbers is impressive. Between 2006, when formally privatised higher education was first permitted, and early 2014, 82 private institutions have been established and enrolled around 70,000 students across the country. The emergence and growth of privatised higher learning is now a central aspect of rapid massification of higher education in the country. Fuelled by the expansion of primary and secondary school and a general demand for higher education in recent years, Afghanistan is well on the way to producing the largest 'educated' class it has ever seen.

The move towards privatised higher education and the expansion of the higher-education sector have occurred faster than development of the necessary governance and institutional framework. The institutional and regulatory environment is characterised by weak and inadequate regulations, poor enforcement and lack of strategic vision.

Furthermore, the weak governance and regulatory environment is allowing a highly consequential yet not immediately tangible competition between political and religious patronage networks over the loyalty and future direction of the country's rapidly expanding intelligentsia. Government officials charged with regulating and monitoring the private sector seek to impose the bureaucratic standards of state universities on private institutions. However, the state universities lack the credibility to act as standard bearers for the more ambitious and innovative private institutions. As a result, concerns have arisen that, in the effort to impose bureaucratic uniformity, the government may stifle growth in quality.

The rapid expansion in quantity of education is coming at a price in quality. Reforms and reconstruction efforts have not achieved much in transforming the archaic nature of higher learning and methods of teaching in most state universities. State universities have responded to the exponential

rise in demand by expanding their enrolment capacity while neglecting more difficult and long-term efforts to improve the quality of education, including making significant changes in governance and faculty. While the increasing number of private institutions has opened opportunities for better quality education outside the state sector, quality remains an important concern in many private institutions, too. However, different factors in state as compared with private institutions affect this concern for quality. State universities have the advantage of established institutional credibility with clearly delineated bureaucratic structures and reliable though limited government financing. The state universities' main challenge comes from poorly qualified faculty members who use their entrenched bureaucratic position to resist serious reform programmes. By contrast, the quality of education in private institutions is most threatened by the predominant motivation of their founders and investors. Some prioritise immediate economic gain over long-term interests of the institutions. For others, the nature and quality of education are secondary to their political and ideological goals. The current government approach fails to account for the motivation of founders and sponsors to make institutions and university campuses into arenas of 'political socialisation', where students are exposed to particularistic and at times highly ideological political beliefs and attitudes.

Afghanistan's intelligentsia is growing fast in tandem with a 'youth bulge' in which young people are a high proportion of the overall population. It is also expanding in a tenuous and uncertain social and political environment, with limited prospects for socio-economic and political integration and mobility. After more than a decade, international intervention – the driver of most economic and job growth in recent years – is scaling down and becoming limited. Consequently, the higher education sector is gaining more strategic significance for the future of the country, with profound implications for political stability, security and socio-economic development. As institutions multiply, the sector gains importance as a driver of social and political change and a strategic arena of competition for the educated class.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Aim	4
1.2 Methodology	5
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	5
2.1 History of Higher Education in Afghanistan	5
2.2 Post-2001 Revival and Expansion	6
3. INSTITUTIONAL AND REGULATORY CONTEXT	10
3.1 Institutional Development	10
3.2 Slow and Inadequate Regulations	11
3.3 Department of Private Higher Education Institutes	12
3.4 Accreditation and Quality Assurance Department	13
4. QUALITY VIS-À-VIS QUANTITY AND THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS	15
4.1 The Challenge of Quality	15
4.2 Private Institutes as Extensions of Political and Religious Patronage Networks	16
5. CONCLUSION	19

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim

In recent years, the higher education system has been rapidly expanding in Afghanistan. Besides the overburdened state universities, private institutions of higher education are also proliferating. Since the first private institutes of higher education opened in 2006, the private sector has been expanding fast to emerge as a serious competitor to the state's 23 universities and seven institutes. Towards the end of 2013, the private sector included 82 universities and institutes with about 70,000 students across the country. The sector is expected to expand even more rapidly in the coming years as increasingly larger numbers of high school graduates compete for entrance to both state and private universities.

The expansion of the higher education system is likely to have profound implications for the political and socio-economic future of the country. For the first time in its history, Afghanistan is experiencing massification of higher learning, the opening of the doors of its universities to mass society. An important and obvious corollary of the trend is a rapid development of a much larger 'educated' class that can profoundly influence the future of the country. The educated class is emerging at a time Afghanistan is transitioning from more than a decade of international intervention to a more independent path of political and socio-economic development. This period of high political, social and economic uncertainty is marked by limited and shrinking prospects of employment for university graduates, a tense and fluid political environment and ongoing armed conflict. Under the present circumstances, will the massification of higher education contribute to political stability and socio-economic development or exacerbate the already tenuous situation by creating further political, social and economic strains?

Higher education in Afghanistan, particularly private higher education, remain a neglected area of scholarly research as most scholars and analysts are focused on the more immediate issues of political stability and armed conflict. So far, only Yahya Baiza (2006) and Antonio Giustozzi (2010) studied dimensions of the challenges and prospects of higher education and its implications for the country. Baiza looks at the broader politics of reform and reconstruction of higher education between 2001 and 2006 in Afghanistan. He focuses at bureaucratic

politics in the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) between reform-minded officials and what he describes as the "conservative-minded group".¹ Giustozzi offers a historical analysis of student political activism since the 1960s and argues that in the post-2001 period, student engagement in politics is "characterized by the predominance of patronage-based relationship between students and political parties."²

This paper aims to provide an up-to-date and deeper understanding of both bureaucratic politics in the MoHE and the role of patronage networks in private institutions of higher learning. The role of patronage networks is important because private university campuses are central to 'political socialisation' of the emerging educated class. The paper highlights the role of university campuses as microcosms and drivers of the political and social environment of the country. It argues that privatised higher education has opened access to higher learning by shouldering some of the burdens placed on government-financed higher education. It has also opened doors for innovation and transformation in an otherwise stagnant and inflexible state sector. In other words, the entry of private entrepreneurs into the sector has weakened the entrenched academic establishment's monopoly on higher education, and hopes have risen that the competitive nature of commercialised education may bring higher quality.

On the other hand, the paper also demonstrates the risks of private institutions proliferating under the current circumstances. It argues that a poor and slow regulatory framework, administered by weak, inexperienced and often sceptical officials has opened the sector to powerful patronage networks and economic entrepreneurs driven by short-term political goals and economic gains. Government officials attempt to impose the archaic and inflexible administrative and educational standards of the

¹Yahya Baiza, 'The Politics of Higher Education in Contemporary Afghanistan: The post-Taliban experience', in *Education in the Muslim World: Different perspectives*, ed by Rosarii Griffin, Oxford, Symposium Books 2006, 305–23.

²Antonio Giustozzi, 'Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan', Briefing Paper, *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)*, February 2010, <http://www.areu.org.af/EditionDetails.aspx?EditionId=312&ContentId=7&ParentId=7&Lang=en-US>.

state universities on the private sector, giving rise to concerns that government regulations may impose uniformity rather than quality. Furthermore, privatisation of higher learning has also created opportunities for political and religious groups that have established institutes of higher learning as extensions of their patronage networks and centres of particular worldviews and ideologies. In short, private institutes have fast become an important arena of political and ideological rivalries for the direction of the expanding educated class of Afghanistan.

1.2 Methodology

The research for this paper was conducted in Kabul during January through May 2013 and is based on twenty-one qualitative interviews with MoHE officials, as well as founders, managers, lecturers and students of private institutes in Kabul. Some of the information is based on 15 informal conversations with individuals directly or indirectly involved in the sector, including students and lecturers from state universities. The interviewees were selected to reflect the diversity of private institutions of higher education, including ideological and socio-political orientation and date of establishment. Hence, the interviews covered institutions established in 2006 as well as new ones established in 2013. They also covered institutes along the spectrum from commercially oriented at one end to politically or ideologically oriented on the other.

Analysis of the institutional and regulatory context is based on extensive desk study of various guidelines and by-laws regulating and administering private higher education institutes in the country. The statistical data indicating long-term trends is based mainly on the yearbooks published by the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO), though some other sources have also been consulted.

The first section of this paper offers a brief background and introduces the notion of privatised higher learning. It discusses the emergence of private institutes against a relatively long history of the state-run higher education system in Afghanistan. The second section describes the institutional context, focusing on regulation of the private sector and the roles of various MoHE departments. The final section discusses the major

issues and trends in the expansion and evolution of private higher education in the country.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 History of Higher Education in Afghanistan

The foundation of modern higher education was laid in Afghanistan when a Faculty of Medicine was established in 1932 in Kabul.³ The students of the faculty were taught by a team of eight lecturers led by Kamil Beg Rafiqi, a Turkish doctor. Faculties of science in 1935, law and political science in 1938 and literature in 1944 followed. In 1946, these separate faculties merged to create Kabul University, the first in the country and now widely referred to as the 'mother university' in symbolic recognition of its historical and socio-cultural pedigree. In 1963, Nangrahar University, the country's second, opened in the eastern city of Jalalabad, followed by the Polytechnic University in Kabul in 1969. Student enrolment, however, remained low and the universities recruited mostly from among urban elites.

During the 1960s, the elitist and urban character of the higher education system began to change, absorbing significant numbers of students from the provinces. The number of students increased from 1,700 in 1960 to 12,260 – including 1,680 female students – in 1975.⁴ During this period, the university campuses in Kabul became a hotbed of intense political and ideological struggle with serious implications for the politics and conflicts of subsequent decades. Some of the most influential political and ideological groups – Islamist, pro-Soviet and Maoist Communist and nationalist groups – have roots in the student activist and intellectual circles of this period.⁵

³ Mir G. Ghubar, *Afghanistan in the Course of History*, Vol. II, Peshawar, Maiwand 1999, 84.

⁴ Saif R. Samady, *Education and Afghan Society in the Twentieth Century*, Paris, UNESCO 2001, 59, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001246/124627e.pdf>.

⁵ For an extended analysis of student activism in the 1960s, see Giustozzi 'Between Patronage...' [see FN 2]. For a discussion of the emergence of parties in the 1960s, see

Consequently, Afghanistan's higher education system was intertwined with and deeply affected by the turmoil and instability the country has experienced over the past three decades. It became a driver as well as the key arena for violent political and ideological competition. It produced some of the most prominent protagonists in subsequent decades of war, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massud among the leaders of the Islamist mujahedin organisations, and Muhammad Najibullah, Babrak Karmal and Nur Muhammad Taraki among the leaders of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The sector was also deeply affected by changes of power between different political and ideological groups. Student enrolment increased under the rule of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1992. In 1990, 24,333 students enrolled in institutions of higher education. However, during the 1992–96 civil war among various mujahedin factions, many university buildings in Kabul were destroyed and or severely damaged. The Taliban rule (1996–2001) dealt the final blow to what was left of the educational system and faculty members. The number of students dropped to 10,655 in 1995 and 7,881 in 2001. In 2003, an Asian Development Bank report noted that "by any measure, the education system in Afghanistan has collapsed."⁶

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, formally recognised higher education essentially remained a government monopoly. The constitution adopted by the Constitutional Loya Jirga in January 2004 opened the higher education sector for the first time to private investors. Delegates of

the jirga, on the one hand, placed the overall responsibility of providing free higher education up to the bachelor's level on the state and, on the other allowed Afghan citizens and foreign nationals to "establish higher, general and specialised educational as well as literacy institutions with permission of the state."⁷

2.2 Post-2001 Revival and Expansion

Following the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, the education sector in Afghanistan experienced the most dramatic expansion of its history. Except for the provinces most severely affected by the growing insurgency in the south and east in recent years, the education system has been struggling to cope with the exponential rise in demand for education at all levels.

The single most important driver of this expansion is an explosive growth in public demand for learning, outstripping educational services at every level. As statistics of school and university enrolment in recent years show, much of Afghanistan's young population, held back by decades of war and turmoil, now look at education as a path to social and economic advancement. This growth in demand is closely linked to a 'youth bulge' in Afghanistan's population. In the absence of a national census, estimates of the country's population differ significantly, but all point to a very young and rapidly growing population. In its 2011–12 (1391 in Afghan calendar) figures, the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) estimated 46.1 per cent of the 26.5 million population was below the age of 15.⁸ According to the United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA), 23 per cent of estimated 30.6 million was between 10 and 19 years old, and the population is growing at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent, one of the highest in the world.⁹ Consequently, demands for services

Thomas Ruttig, 'Leftists, Islamists and a Void in the Centre: Afghanistan's Political Parties and Where they Come From (1902–2006)', Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Afghanistan Office 2006,

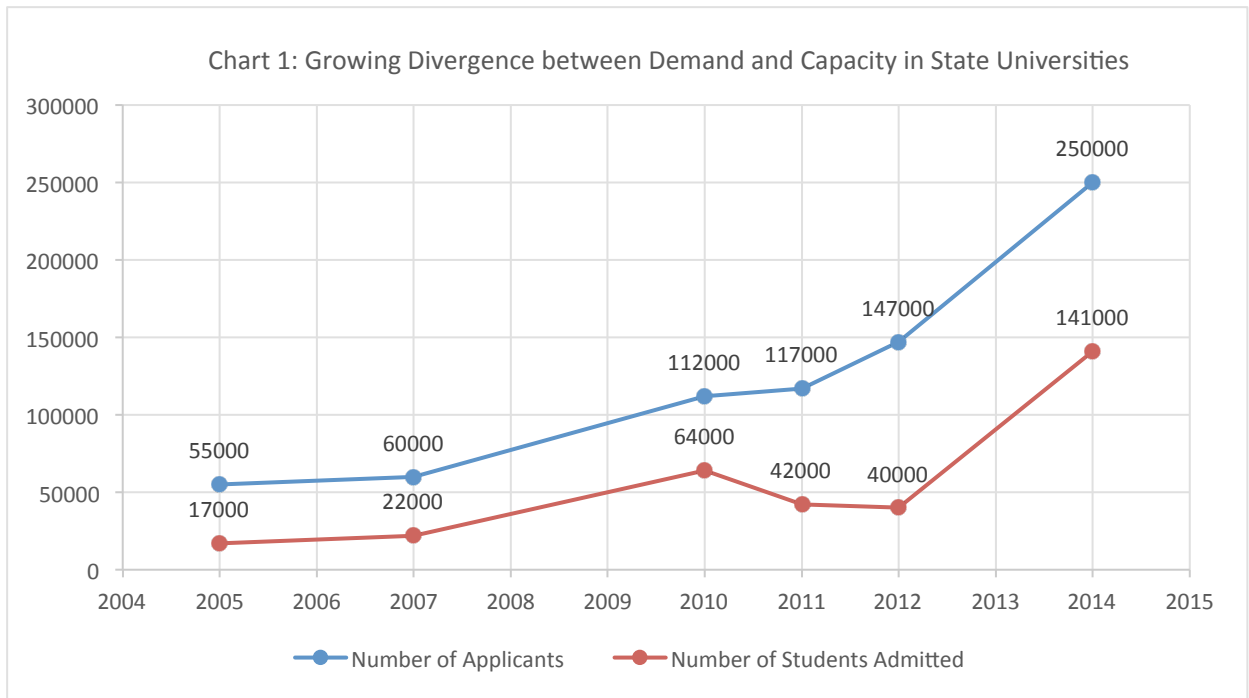
<http://www.kas.de/afghanistan/en/publications/9674/>; Niamatullah Ibrahim, 'Ideology without Leadership: The Rise and Decline of Maoism in Afghanistan', AAN Thematic Report 03/2012, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, August 2012, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/09/Nibr-Maoists-final.pdf>.

⁶ Jouko Sarvi, 'A New Start for Afghanistan's Education Sector', Asian Development Bank, April 2003, http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/pub/2003/New_Start_Education_Sector_AFG.pdf.

⁷ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, article 43–6.

⁸ Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2012–13 (1391), Central Statistics Organization, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul, <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/4722/2012-2-13>.

⁹ Nancy Williamson, 'Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy', *The State of World Population 2013*, Information and External Relations Division, UNFPA 2013, <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/swp2013/EN-SWOP2013-final.pdf>. The more popularly cited



Source: Compiled by the author from various sources, including the Afghanistan Statistical Yearbooks from 2009 to 2012.

including education and employment can be expected to rise continually in the coming years.¹⁰

The education system has expanded remarkably since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 as shown in education statistics. The number of primary school students jumped from less than one million in 1999 to more than five million in 2010. According to Afghan government figures, in the year 2012–13 (1391) 8.92 million student – including 3.38 million females – enrolled in 15,572 schools across the country. Similarly, the number of university students has jumped from 7,800 in 2001 to about 162,849 in

estimates by the CIA suggests that 64.2 per cent of Afghanistan's population is below the age of 24, including 42 per cent below the age of 14. See: The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 'The WorldFactbook, Afghanistan: People and Society', updated 11 March 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the implications of the youth bulge in Afghanistan, see Linda Lavender, 'The Youth Bulge in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities', Thematic Report October 2011, Civil-Military Fusion Centre.

2013.¹¹ The capacity of the state higher education sector to absorb new students has improved at the rate of 15 per cent every year between 2002 and 2010, and the MoHE plans to increase its intake capacity to 115,000 students by end of 2014.¹² It is important to note that while the usual caveat with statistics in Afghanistan applies to these figures, they clearly demonstrate that growth in demand for education outpaces the growth in expansion of the universities. Competition for seats in the state universities has turned Kankur, the annual university entry examinations, into a recurrent occasion for increasingly politicised debate and contention among various social and political groups. At the centre of the debate is the integrity and credibility of the national exams conducted by the MoHE.¹³

¹¹ CSO, Afghanistan... [see FN 8].

¹² 'National Higher Education Strategic Plan: 2010–2014', Ministry of Higher Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul November 2009.

¹³ For an analysis of the controversies over the annual Kankur, or university entrance examinations, see: Obaid Ali, 'Cheating and Worse: The university entry (kankur)

Despite rapid expansion in recent years, Afghanistan's higher education institutions have only a five per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), that is, those enrolled in tertiary education as a percentage of the eligible age group in the country. This is one of the lowest in the world. By way of comparison with other countries in the region, GER is five per cent in Pakistan and ten and 20 per cent in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan respectively.¹⁴ The figures also show a high gender disparity in student enrolment across the country. Although enrolment increased exponentially over the past decade, it has been slower among female students. In fact, the number of female students as percentage of the total higher education student population has dropped from 30 per cent in 2002 to 19 per cent in 2013.¹⁵ According to the CSO figures, female enrolment as percentage of overall enrolment in private sector higher education increased from 14.88 per cent in 2010–11 to 19.01 per cent in 2012–13.¹⁶ The figures show that the gap between female enrolment in the public and private sectors is insignificant. Chart 1 shows the widening gap between capacity in the sector and demand for higher education.

The pictures these figures paint of the revival of the higher education system is an incomplete and poor guide to the challenges of establishing or reconstructing credible institutions of higher

learning. A 2010 World Bank report on the situation of higher education in the country noted that despite remarkable achievements, state universities suffered from inadequate physical infrastructure and acute shortages of qualified faculty members and financial resources. Critically, the report highlighted that the sector lacked "relevance and linkages with the economy" and "that most higher education institutions have little autonomy, if any, and are subject to rigid administrative regulations and rules. The notion of planning, management and performance indicators is both foreign and weak in the higher education system and in each institution."¹⁷

The Afghan government is aware of the acute challenges in the sector. In its first National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2010–14), the MoHE acknowledged the key challenges, including that "outdated curricula, under-qualified faculty members, lack of proper classrooms and laboratories, under-resourced libraries and the lack of adequate information technology are among the acute and pressing problems faced by the higher education sector."¹⁸ Because of the dismal quality of their curricula and out-dated teaching methods, an observer with experience in both public and private universities described state-run universities as being merely "*madrassas plus*". Afghanistan's state universities teach a whole range of modern sciences but they use outdated materials, rely heavily on memorisation at the expense of students' intellectual development and discourage critical thinking and curiosity (much like most traditional religious schools). Often, decades-old lecture notes (called 'chapters') are the only educational materials distributed to the classrooms; students are then required to learn them by heart without additional readings.¹⁹ As such, students' success in

exams as a bottleneck for higher education', AAN Dispatch, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 26 February 2014, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/cheating-and-worse-the-university-entry-kankur-exams-as-a-bottleneck-for-higher-education>.

¹⁴ Harsha Aturupane, 'Higher Education in Afghanistan, An Emerging Mountainscape', Working Paper 80915, The World Bank, August 2013, 13, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/08/18197239/higher-education-afghanistan-higher-education-afghanistan-emerging-mountainscape>. For a comparison of trends in higher education between Afghanistan and other countries in South Asia, see 'Higher Education in South Asia: Trends in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka', a custom research report for British Council by the Economist Intelligence Unit, June 2013, http://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/britishcouncil.in2/files/sapd_british_council_south_he_report.pdf.

¹⁵ Aturupane, 'Higher Education in Afghanistan...' [see FN 14], 19–20.

¹⁶ CSO 'Afghanistan...' [see FN 8], 45–6.

¹⁷ The World Bank, 'Afghanistan: Country Summary of Higher Education', August 2010, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1121703274255/1439264-1193249163062/Afghanistan_CountrySummary.pdf.

¹⁸ MoHE, 'National Higher Education...' [see FN 12].

¹⁹ Interview with an Afghan development worker and lecturer at a private university, Kabul, 28 February 2013. He was involved in a reform effort at Kabul University. See also Ilham Gharji, 'Tahsilat-e aali, amniat wa tawseah dar Afghanistan' [Higher Education, Security and Development in Afghanistan], *BBC Persian Service*, 26 May 2013,

examinations depends largely on the degree to which they can memorise and conform to the standards of the chapters. A student of the Journalism Faculty of Kabul University who graduated in 2013 asserted that throughout his four-year undergraduate programme, he was not required to read a single book completely.²⁰

According to him and others the author interviewed during the course of this research, reading materials in Kabul University are usually limited to the antiquated lecture notes distributed by their professors. Some of these students also asserted that intellectually curious students who are familiar with the wider literature on the subjects and express new arguments and ideas other than those of their professors are discouraged and humiliated in front of their peers.²¹

In addition, academic cadres, most with poor academic credentials, dominate the public higher education sector. A breakdown of qualifications of faculty members in public universities reveals the challenges of reforming the sector. As of 2008, 11,611, or more than 50 per cent, of the 22,526 faculty members of public universities had only a bachelor's degree; another 775, or more than 30 per cent, had post-graduate qualifications, and only 140, or more than five per cent, had a PhD.²² By 2013, the situation at Kabul University had not changed much. According to its president, Habibullah Habib, in May 2013 more than half its 800 faculty still only have bachelor's degrees.²³

Some observers note that most, and often the powerful, members of the academic establishment at state universities are connected to higher

powerful political groups outside the universities. They are cognizant of the danger to their careers of any overarching reforms requiring that a substantial number of better-educated faculty members enter their ranks.²⁴ In addition, many faculty members with low qualifications most likely occupy senior academic and administrative positions, as they stayed in Afghanistan throughout the years of war. As a result, it is not uncommon to find individuals in state universities with bachelor's degrees in the position of heads of faculties and departments.

Recently, growing tension between the academic establishment in Kabul and students disgruntled with the pace of reforms have found expression in public and politicised controversies. For example, in May 2013, Faruq Abdullah, head of the Social Science Faculty of Kabul University and Faisal Amin, one of its professors, became subjects of controversy. On 20 May 2013, some 80 mainly Hazara students of the Social Science Faculty began an eight-day hunger strike and sit-in protest against alleged ethnic discrimination and their professors' poor educational qualifications. They called for the removal of Abdullah and Faisal Amin, both of whom hold bachelor's degrees. They questioned their qualifications for the posts they held and accused them of discriminating against a certain group of students based on ethnicity. The accusations and counteraccusation that followed placed Kabul University, the largest of the state universities and recipient of a large portion of international assistance, at the centre of intense debate with many civil society activists and some of the country's leading cultural and intellectual figures calling for broader reforms of the higher education sector.²⁵ The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Evaluation and Monitoring Committee (MEC) found evidence of corruption and ethnic and gender prejudices in state universities. A recent MEC investigation found that

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2013/05/130526_k03_afghan_universities_and_students_strike.shtml.

²⁰ Conversation with a 2013 graduate of the Journalism Faculty of Kabul University, Kabul, 2 April 2013.

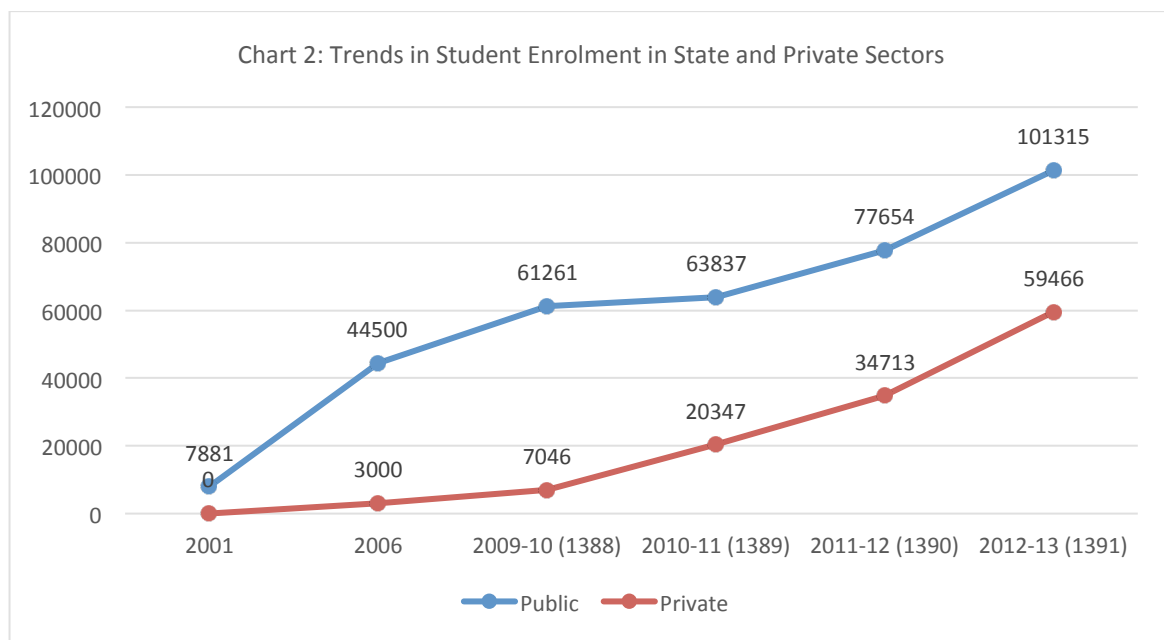
²¹ Conversations with students of Kabul University, Kabul, February-March 2013.

²² MoHE, 'National Higher Education...' [see FN 12], Sub-Program 1-1: Professional Faculty/Staff Development.

²³ Kawun Khamush, 'Daneshgah-e Kabul, dar jostojoye howiat-e diroz' [Kabul University, in search of its past identity], *BBC Persian Service*, 9 May 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2013/05/130509_k03_kabul_80_years_anniversary.shtml.

²⁴ Interview with an Afghan development worker who attempted to launch a post-graduate programme in Kabul University in partnership with Western universities, Kabul, 29 February 2013.

²⁵ Niamatullah Ibrahim, 'About Discrimination and Internet Access: Another student protest in Kabul', AAN Dispatch, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 28 May 2013, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/about-discrimination-and-internet-access-another-student-protest-in-kabul>.



Source: Afghanistan Yearbooks 2008, 2010 and 2012, Central Statistics Organisation; Harsha Aturupane, 'Higher Education in Afghanistan, An Emerging Mountainscape', Working Paper 80915, The World Bank, August 2013, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/08/18197239/higher-education-afghanistan-higher-education-afghanistan-emerging-mountainscape>

"limited professionalism", "disregard for legal frameworks", "tribal, national, linguistic and religious prejudices" and "external intervention and undue influences" in state universities in Kabul, including Kabul University.²⁶

3. INSTITUTIONAL AND REGULATORY CONTEXT

3.1 Institutional Development

Against this backdrop of soaring demand and the inadequacies of the public sector, introducing private higher education was imperative. The 2004 constitutional provisions generated keen interest among various groups, including international donors, education entrepreneurs, business people and political and religious groups. In Kabul, Kardan Institute of Higher Education was the first to emerge

²⁶ Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC), 'Report on University Internal Examination Process', Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment (VCA) Report, Kabul October 2013, <http://www.mec.af/files/VCAReportExamination.pdf>.

in 2003, followed by the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) in 2006. Since then the number of private institutes has been rising fast. In 2008–09 (1387), only seven private institutes existed; in 2009–10 (1388), the number rose to 12, in 2010–11 (1389) to 30 and in 2011–12 (1390) to 43. The sector made the largest stride in 2012 and by early 2013, 76 private universities and institutes existed across the country. As of March 2014, there are 82 private institutes and universities.²⁷

The mushrooming of private institutes has significantly transformed the country's higher education landscape. The private sector is now at the heart of both the challenges and solutions for

²⁷ Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011–12, 54, Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Kabul, <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/4722/7108>. 'Afghanistan Statistical Year Book 2010–11', 43, Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Kabul, <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/4722/4725>. Interview with Masud Tarishtwal, Head of the Department of Private Higher Education Institutes, Kabul, 12 March 2013.

the future of higher learning in the country. Private institutes have taken the lead in introducing new technologies, disciplines and teaching methodologies. Beside traditional disciplines like the social and natural sciences that have a relatively long history in the country, many private institutes offer a wide range of undergraduate programmes in new fields such as computer science, information technology, business and accounting. In 2013, a significant number of institutes gained full recognition as universities and began offering post-graduate programmes as well. Most also offer short-term non-degree programmes in English, accounting and information technology. The introduction of a wide range of programmes with an emphasis on English materials has the potential to train a new layer of professionals connected to and profoundly influenced by globalising forces (see a list of private institutions and their faculties at the end).

Some private institutes have also introduced innovations in traditional disciplines. Largely staffed by young lecturers with qualifications from universities abroad, these institutes are imparting current and up-to-date ideas. In addition, most institutes have created flexible and diverse educational opportunities. They offer evening classes that attract a significant number of students from among the staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations. Students in most private institutes range from the offspring of well-to-do urban and rural families to NGO staff, owners of private enterprises and members of parliament.

Financially, tuition fees paid by the students are the only source of revenue for most private institutions. Tuition fees significantly vary from institute to institute. For example, tuition fees for a usually four-year bachelor's programme at the American University of Afghanistan are roughly 26,000 US dollars. However, more than half of its students receive some form of financial aid. By contrast, the fees for a similar bachelor's programme in business administration at Dunya Institute of Higher Education are about 6,436 US dollars and for a bachelor's in social science at the Ibn-e Sina Institute of Higher Education around 4,000 US dollars. Besides AUAF, other institutes also offer financial assistance but on a more modest scale. The AUAF is also distinguished by the generous support it has received from the Afghan and US governments as well as private businesses. The assistance it has received from the US government includes a 42

million dollar grant for a five-year term that began in 2008 and another grant of more than 40 million dollars for another five years in 2013. The Afghan government has also given it a large tract of land in West Kabul with a 99-year lease. It is also important to note that fees are much higher for more-technical fields such as medical and engineering programmes. Also, no broadly accepted criteria exist against which the amount of the fees are determined, and as such conversations about most private institutions abound with complaints about inappropriate and arbitrary fees.²⁸

Some institutions have trouble achieving a sufficient level of financial viability. Others' credibility and integrity are threatened by the non-educational motives of their political and religious patrons. More importantly, the potential advantages of privatised higher education in many institutions may be undermined by weak and inappropriate regulation and standards and an old-fashioned bureaucratic mentality that is yet to fully admit non-state education providers as legitimate and complementary in the overall development of the higher education system. Hence, the MoHE's efforts to regulate the private sector have lagged behind the actual establishment and development of private institutes.

3.2 Slow and Inadequate Regulations

Officials at the MoHE began to discuss regulations of private higher education in 2006. However, the idea of forming the private university that became the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) was raised as early as 2002. The discussion began at a time when the demand for higher education was mounting and preparations were well underway to establish the AUAF. Internal discussion in the MoHE resulted in the Regulations on Private Higher Education Institutes²⁹ which the cabinet adopted on 14 February 2007. In the words of a former MoHE official, the document was passed as "an adopted

²⁸ Interviews with a student and lecturer of AUAF and students and administrators of Ibn-e Sina and Dunya Institutes of Higher Education, Kabul, April 2013.

²⁹ Interviews with current and former officials of the Ministry of Higher Education, Kabul, January-February 2013

son” because it lacked and still does a basis in relevant statutory law.³⁰ The country’s 1989 Law on Civil Higher Educational Institutions does not recognise a private education sector.³¹ A new draft higher educational law has been embroiled in controversy every time it has appeared on the parliament’s agenda since 2008.³²

Towards the end of 2012, MoHE officials considered amending the regulations to improve its relevance and efficacy for a much larger sector than was anticipated in 2006. In July 2013, the amendments in the document were published in the official gazette.³³ In March 2013, when the amendments were being discussed, the head of the Department of Private Higher Education (DPHEI) at the MoHE said the revisions aimed to tighten conditions for registering new institutes and boost the credibility and quality of private institutes and their graduates. The proposed changes included tougher conditions for registering institutions such as a permanent

campus; promotion and protection of the rights of lecturers to pensions, promotions and job security similar to peers at state universities; extension of government scholarship programmes to graduates and lecturers of private institutes; creation of an association of private institutes; establishment of a consultative council of private institutes under the leadership of the MoHE; and a standard for determining fees.³⁴

The final amendments reflected only some of these earlier suggestions. What is certain is that the conditions under which a private institution can be established are now tougher. The distinction between a university and an institute is clearer: the former is required to have a permanent campus, at least four separate faculties and post-graduate programmes. Importantly, a university is also required to include a ‘centre of scientific research’ but what constitutes scientific research and how it will be evaluated are not clear. By contrast, an institute comprises at least three faculties and teaches undergraduate programmes only. It is permitted to recruit lecturers with bachelor’s qualifications. Founders of both universities and institutes are required to submit a statute and organisational structure, a budget plan, curricula and teaching plan. Universities must deposit 15 million Afghanis and institutes must deposit ten million Afghanis as a guarantee to the government.³⁵ Furthermore, the government also collects 500,000 and 300,000 Afghanis as royalties for establishment of a university or an institute respectively.³⁶

3.3 Department of Private Higher Education Institutes

The regulations provide that “a specific unit shall be established at the MoHE to maintain relations with institutions and monitor their academic affairs.”³⁷

³⁰ Interview with Dr. Askar Mousavi, former advisor to the Minister of Higher Education, Kabul, 12 January 2013.

³¹ ‘Law of Civil Higher Education Institutions’, Official Gazette No. 703, 5 November 1989 (15 Aqrab 1368), Ministry of Justice, Republic of Afghanistan Kabul.

³² One of the thorniest issues in the debate over the law in parliament involves the words used for university, faculty and the ranks of academic professors in Dari and Pashto, the two main official languages of the country. For instance, the initial draft sent by the Ministry of Justice to the parliament contained the word *pohantun and pohanai*, Pashto words for university and faculty, respectively. Dari speakers, however, insisted that Dari equivalents *daneshgah, and daneshkada* be used in the Dari version of the law. Pashto speakers in their turn argued that according to Article 16 of the 2004 Constitution, the Pashto equivalents are national terminologies and must be preserved. For an earlier discussion of the controversies over the law, see Ali Amiri and Abdul Jalil Benish, ‘The First Experience: Voting Patterns and Political Alignments in Wolesi Jirga, 2005–2010’, Afghanistan Watch, September 2010, <http://www.watchafghanistan.org/2010-09-16/the-first-experience-voting-patterns-and-political-alignments-in-wolesi-jirga-2005-2010/>.

³³ ‘*Ta’dil wa aizad dar barkhi az mawad-e moqarraa-i moasisat-e tahsilat-e aali khosusi*’ [Amendments and Additions in Some Articles of the Regulations of Private Higher Education Institutions], Official Gazette No. 114, Ministry of Justice, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul, July 2013, 25–34.

³⁴ Interview with Tarishtwal [see FN 27].

³⁵ Ministry of Justice, ‘Amendments and Additions...’ [see FN 33].

³⁶ Before the amendment, the royalty was 200,000 Afghanis. The *Regulations* defined the guarantee as “equal to half the expenditures of the cost of a program of study of the institution”. In practice, it was collected as an equivalent of 200,000 US dollars.

³⁷ ‘*Regulation of Private Institutions of Higher Education (Moqarar-e moasisat-e tahsilat-e a’ali khosusi)*’ Official

However, according to former and current MoHE officials, the size and the level of bureaucratic unit responsible for administration and regulation of the private sector became the subject of intense interdepartmental debate in the ministry. These debates revealed that some senior officials felt uneasy and suspicious towards even the concept of higher learning outside state universities. Some officials proposed creating a separate position of deputy minister to regulate and monitor the private sector while the more sceptical bureaucrats proposed simply creating an office within the Student Affairs Department of the ministry.³⁸ In 2007, Minister Azam Dadfar intervened to end the interdepartmental scuffle, took the middle ground and created a new department. This became the Department of Private Higher Education Institutes (DPHEI), one of several departments within the MoHE bureaucracy.³⁹

3.4 Accreditation and Quality Assurance Department

In July 2012, the MoHE also established the Department of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (DAQA), which pursues two important objectives: initiating the country's first accreditation programme and improving the quality of higher education in both public and private sectors. The accreditation process includes an external review of "faculty members, teaching, research, and service, as well as infrastructure, financial viability, sustainability, outcomes, and compliance with existing laws".⁴⁰ The review assesses either an institution as a whole (institutional accreditation) or a specific programme or faculty within each institution (programme accreditation).⁴¹

The accreditation is a four-stage process. First, the institution demonstrates that it meets the basic requirements, such as valid registration with the MoHE, and enters a self-assessment process and. It is followed by a second phase, "candidacy for accreditation level one", a peer review process that will form the basis of the decision by the Council of Accreditation Agency. The third phase, "candidacy for accreditation level two", is achieved a year after an institution successfully passes level one. The institution enters the fourth and final phase after it has gone through another process of "self-assessment" and "a site visit by a team of peer reviewers and their positive recommendation to the Council of the Accreditation Agency".⁴² The standards and criteria against which public and private institutes are assessed are detailed in a separate document, "Procedures and Worksheet on the Criteria for Higher Education Institutional Self-Assessment", which forms the basis of self-assessment by each institute and the subsequent site visit by department officials.⁴³

At first look, the accreditation process gives the impression of a highly rigorous bureaucratic process. However, the main challenge lies in the actual capacity of departments to enforce these rules and procedures. There is a clear mismatch between the stated missions of DPHEI and the DAQA and their capacity and resources. Both departments are chronically under-resourced in the face of challenging and expanding responsibilities. The DPHEI officials see their role as both supporting the private sector and monitoring the quality of education delivered at these institutes. With 16 staff members, the department has a huge administrative workload. It ranges from assessing applications for registering new institutes to more-routine tasks such

Gazette, Special Issue 939, Ministry of Justice, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul, March 2008, Article 25.

³⁸ Interviews with current and former MoHE official...[see FN 29].

³⁹ Interviews with current and former MoHE officials...[see FN 29]

⁴⁰ 'Bye Laws for Quality Assurance and Accreditation', Ministry of Higher Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, July 2011, Article 2.

⁴¹ 'Bye Laws for Quality...' [see FN 40], Article 2.

⁴² 'Bye Laws for Quality...' [see FN 40] Article 9.

⁴³ These are Mission and Purpose, Governance and Administration, Academic Programs, Faculty Members and Staff, Students and Learning, Library and Information Resources, Physical and Technical Resources, Financial Resources, Strategic Planning and Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Improvement, Contribution to Society and Development and Integrity, Disclosure and Transparency. See: 'Procedures and Worksheet on the Criteria for Higher Education Institutional Self-Assessment', Ministry of Higher Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul, 12 December 2008.

as handling an increasing workload of student affairs. In comparison, the DAQA is in an even earlier stage of developing administrative and operational capacity. It operates from a two-room office in the ministry, and as of mid-2013 it has recruited only ten out of its total 20 planned staff. Nearly all members of its committees and subcommittees are appointed from among the faculty members of main state universities in Kabul, including Nazir Najabi its current Acting Director who is a professor of engineering at Polytechnic University.

To overcome the challenges of inadequate technical capacity, both DPHEI and DAQA have been outsourcing their responsibilities, mainly to various faculties of Kabul University. This has been particularly the case in more technical areas demanding expert knowledge. For example, the DPHEI often relies on relevant departments of Kabul University and other state universities to assess educational curricula in private institutions. This has proven controversial, as private institutions complain that they are judged by the standards of Kabul University. The more ambitious institutes claim this is hampering their efforts to innovate and introduce progressive and innovative methods and disciplines. One chancellor of a private institute, for instance, noted that his institute's proposal to include "comparative politics of state building" and "comparative experience of political reconciliation" in its political science curriculum was rejected in the first submission. The Law and Political Science Faculty of Kabul University, asked to assess the curriculum, does not have such subjects in its curricula. At times, Kabul University faculty members have also delayed such requests, claiming they are entitled to extra remuneration for work outsourced to them by the ministry.⁴⁴

Contentions over the standards of government and private universities are compounded by the less-visible but pervasive cynicism of many government officials towards the private sector. Cynical attitudes towards private institutions have been expressed in public statements as well as in interactions between managers of private schools and universities and government officials. In his public address on Education Day of 2011, President Karzai alleged that most investors in private education were seeking

quick economic profit. He urged them "not to destroy the future of the country's youth and find other avenues for making money."⁴⁵ While the need to ensure quality in private centres of learning and control profit-seeking entrepreneurs are legitimate concerns of this important sector for the future of the country, official cynicism has even deeper roots. Many government officials, accustomed to Afghanistan's highly statist and centralised bureaucratic structure, have been slow in adapting to a competitive environment in which the government does not have sole monopoly and private investors are recognised as legitimate and complementary actors. In the words of a PHEI manager, "they [government officials] see us as rivals and commercial firms. In their eyes, often we are not different from a Coca-Cola company."⁴⁶

Former MoHE officials confirmed public officials' suspicions and distrust of the private sector. The former officials claimed that opposition to and distrust of the private sector emerged when the idea was discussed during the constitutional consultation process in late 2003. According to them, many public officials believed that opening the education system to private investors was "dangerous" and "could lower the quality of education in the country." However, the rising demand for higher education and the pressure it placed on the government meant the private institutes were allowed at a time when cynicism and suspicion remained high among many officials. Hence, despite official recognition, many officials continue to maintain what a former MoHE official described as an "outdated control mentality" and see the private sector as simply "an extension of the government sector".⁴⁷

The effort to impose state university standards on the private sector has not gone well with many in private institutions. Many lecturers and PHEI

⁴⁴ Interview with a former official the Ministry of Higher Education, Kabul, 12 January 2013.

⁴⁵ 'Aghaz-e sal-e taalimi wa intiqad-e karzai bar makatib khosusi' [Beginning of New Educational Year and Karzai's Criticism of Private Schools] Salamwatandar Network, n.d., accessed 24 March 2013, http://archive.salamwatandar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2797%3A2011-03-24-03-45-32&catid=36%3A2012-06-24-05-02-14&lang=ps.

⁴⁶ Interview with manager of private higher education institute, Kabul, 18 February 2013.

⁴⁷ Interview with former MoHE official, Kabul, 9 January 2013.

managers take pride in the education they received outside Afghanistan in comparison to the in-country training received by most government university professors and bureaucrats. For example, an official of a private institute questioned the qualifications of most in the state sector, contrasting capacity between the two: “a government official who has graduated from school or at best has a bachelor’s degree from Kabul University questions an academic figure with a PhD from other countries.”⁴⁸

4. QUALITY VIS-À-VIS QUANTITY AND THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

4.1 The Challenge of Quality

The private higher education sector is a highly diverse field in terms of its size, quality, vision and motivations of its investors and founders. Students in most private universities have access to the internet, libraries and diverse reading materials in comparison to those in state universities. However, in many private institutions internet access is offered at additional costs, and libraries are modest in both size and types of books. Furthermore, except for the AUAF, private institutes do not offer access to scientific journals and other internet-based resources that require subscription fees. Moreover, original research is nearly non-existent across the sector. As such, despite the perception that in comparison to state universities some private institutes offer higher quality of education, there are serious concerns about the educational standards and financial viability of many others.

In some respects, concerns about quality are probably premature. Institutions of higher learning may need many years to establish the necessary levels of educational and research credentials that are central to their future credibility and legitimacy. However, some early signs do not bode well for the future growth of many institutes. In early 2013, the DPHEI was concluding assessments of 62 of the 76 private institutes and the DAQA had launched initial assessments of its own accreditation programmes.

⁴⁸ Interview with manager of private higher education institute, Kabul, 19 February 2013.

The DPHEI finding does not draw an encouraging picture of the private sector. The report and the detailed criteria used for this assessment are yet to be made public; however, department officials explained that two broad sets of criteria were used. The first aimed to measure the quality of education at each private institute. It assessed the qualifications of faculty members, progress of students, curriculum and quality of teaching. The second set of criteria looked at facilities and infrastructure, including whether institutes had a permanent campus, the necessary facilities and equipment necessary for the courses they offered. Only 14 institutes were labelled “good” and another 14 “poor”. None achieved the marks necessary for placement in the “excellent” category. Those ranked as “poor” were given a two-month period to make necessary improvements and the “good” ones were allowed to launch post-graduate programmes and apply for the status of fully-fledged university. However, 34 institutes were ranked as “satisfactory”. Most of these, in the words of Tarishtwal, were placed in this category with “flexible application of the criteria” – with a more strict assessment they would have failed to achieve this rank.⁴⁹

The DAQA’s assessment targeted 13 state universities and 11 private institutes that had at least one graduation of students. Eight more private institutions were planned to be included in the process in early spring 2013.⁵⁰ Since the DAQA’S assessment is in its early stages, evaluating its effectiveness and overall impact is difficult. However, these exercises by both the DAQA and DPHEI have aroused significant concerns. The DPHEI has disclosed neither the methodology of its assessment nor its final report.⁵¹ Many in the private sector doubted the effectiveness and credibility of

⁴⁹ Interview with Tarishtwal [see FN 27].

⁵⁰ Interview with Muhammad Nazir Najrabi, Director of Department of Accreditation and Quality Assurance, Kabul, 5 March 2013.

⁵¹ In the interview with the author in March 2013 [see FN 27], Tarishtwal said the final report would be published after it was approved by the Council of Ministers. As of March 2014, it has not been published although some institutions were declared universities based on the outcome of the assessment.

DPHEI's decision to promote some institutions to become full universities. Concerns were also raised with regard to the DAQA's accreditation approach. Some lecturers of private institutes who were involved in the assessment process highlighted that while the overall DAQA criteria cover different aspects of an institution, in practice government officials are most concerned with bureaucratic and administrative issues. Therefore, issues like whether an institute building, for example, has facilities like toilets, gets more attention over the content and quality of education.⁵² These criticisms from the private sector reflect the broad concern that government authorities are trying to impose rigid bureaucratic standards and judging private institutes against the standards of government universities as discussed above.

Certainly, all is not so well in the private sector. Data are not publicly available against which to assess the quality of these institutions. Results of the only official assessment conducted by the DPHEI in 2013 have not been made public. What is clear is that the quality of many institutions remains poor. Students and lecturers of many private institutes pointed to major shortcomings. These range from granting marks of attendance to significant numbers of absentee students and favouritism and corruption in administration to unqualified lecturers and little or no access to real libraries. Some university lecturers use the same lecture notes to teach in different shifts at multiple institutions, which mean they have little time for research and preparation. Although the institutions advertise modern libraries, many have little more than a small collection of books and magazines. One commonly raised concern is that in their competition to recruit students, private institutions lower or ignore standards of entry tests. Most institutions appear to accept all or nearly all who take their admission tests. Furthermore, most students apply for private institutions after failing in the annual government university entrance exams.⁵³

Furthermore, some institutes have opened without even registering with the MoHE. During 2013, Afghan journalists discovered unregistered private institutes that were advertising publicly and

⁵² Interviews with lecturers of private institutes of higher education, Kabul, February 2013.

⁵³ This is based on author's interviews and informal conversation in Kabul, March-April 2013.

recruiting students. These included Ibn-e Sina in Jalalabad, Binawa in Kandahar, Sayed Jamaluddin Afghan and Tolo Aftab in Kabul and Alishir Nawa'i in Sar-e Pul. Interestingly, Tolo Aftab opened across the road from the MoHE in Kabul. Some of the founders of these institutes claimed that they were in the process of completing their official registrations. Salim Majroh, founder of Binawa in Kandahar, accused rival private institutes of conspiring against the emergence of a competitor. These reports highlighted the broader and longer-term risks of the rapid development of private higher education. Some went so far as to claim that unregistered private institutes were sources of security threats and centres of intelligence gathering by foreign countries.⁵⁴

The quality of higher education in Afghanistan also faces a more fundamental problem: the recent numerical growth of primary and secondary students has resulted in a massive increase in the number of (mostly poorly educated) applicants for both state and private higher institutions. Those who fail the annual entrance examination to public universities often see private institutes as an alternative. Consequently, private institutions are likely to attract students with lower educational quality. Of course, the wealthy and working professionals are important exceptions, but they probably contribute a small share of the students in private institutions. Some institutes with stringent examination standards noted that about half of their students fail in their first or second semester tests and that many students lack basic writing and reading skills. For instance, Elham Gharji, president of the Gawharshad Institute, asserted that his institute lost about 900 of its 2,000 registered students in the two years since it was established in 2010. Most were dropped after they failed the first- or second-semester examinations.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Zarghona Salehi, 'Shomari az moasibat-e tahsili ba shakle ghair qanuni faaliyat darand' [Some educational institutes are operating illegally], *Pajhwork News Agency*, 15 June 2013; Akbar Rostami, 'Shomari az danishgaha ghair qanuni and' [Some universities are illegal], *8am Daily*, 11 December 2013.

⁵⁵ Interview with Elham Gharji, President of Gawharshad Institute of Higher Education, Kabul, 9 January 2013.

4.2 Private Institutes as Extensions of Political and Religious Patronage Networks

Politicians and religious figures have set up and sponsored a significant number of private institutes. Founders and sponsors of these institutes look at them as a means of cultivating and extending their support base among the country's emerging educated class and, as such, their educational goals may be secondary and subordinate to their ideological worldviews and political interests. Examples include the well-funded private universities of Khatam Al-Nabieen and Dawat, established by Shaikh Asif Mohseni and Abdur Rab Rasul Sayyaf, respectively, two of the most prominent Shia and Sunni conservative figures of the country. Mohseni's Khatam Al-Nabieen is located close to his massive mosque and madrassa complex in the west of the city and includes separate teaching campuses, libraries and dormitories for hundreds of male and female students. Sayyaf's Dawat is located in a newly built large campus at the western edge of the city, close to his stronghold in Paghman. Similarly, in 2012 the Afghan Institute of Higher Education was founded by former Taliban officials including Mawlawi Ahmad Wakil Mutawakil and Mawlawi Abdul Salam Zaif, the regime's former minister of foreign affairs and ambassador to Pakistan, respectively. The institute is run through the Afghan Foundation, which also runs a school. Female students are taught in separate classes at both the school and the institute.⁵⁶ The foundation has plans to branch out to media and banking sectors by establishing its own television and radio networks and an Islamic bank. The Salam Institute of Higher Education was established by Jamiat-e Islah Wa Inkeshaf-e Ejtema-ye Afghanistan (Society for the Reform and Development of Afghan Society), a radical Islamist group with alleged links to Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan. The organisation leads, probably, the most-organised association in Kabul University and has considerable strength at Nangrahar

University.⁵⁷ It also runs a private teacher training institute in Kabul and in July 2012 launched a TV station in Herat. A significant number of other such institutes have direct or indirect links to major political and religious networks of the country.

On the surface, investment in education by political and religious protagonists can be interpreted as a positive development. Some of the resources previously used in violent struggle are being directed towards this critical sector. However, in a poor regulatory environment, this also creates multiple risks. First, massive investment of resources by these groups distorts the competitive nature of the market for higher education in which investors expect to make profits solely by outdoing other competitors by excelling in the quality of their education and credibility. A number of individuals interviewed for this research claimed that the sudden emergence of new institutes with massive resources and lower fees places significant strains on institutes that are operating primarily on revenues they hope to generate through educational services.

Second, establishing educational institutes as an extension of political and religious groups' patronage networks jeopardises the integrity and credibility of the education system, a system meant to contribute to the country's long-term stability and economic and social advancement. University campuses are important places for political socialisation of the educated class. Although most private institutes tend to recruit students from diverse backgrounds, particular social and political groups dominate among founders, lecturers and students. For figures like Sayyaf and Mohseni, who accumulated massive financial resources during the years of war and after, a private institute becomes a convenient niche through which they can strengthen their support base among the country's educated class and further their particular political and ideological interests. An official of a more commercially oriented institute drew an analogy between private media and private institutes. Many of the dozens of private television networks and newspapers that have emerged in recent years essentially function as mouthpieces of

⁵⁶ Malyar Sadeq Azad, 'Dokhtaran ba lebashai rangi dar daneshgahi maqamat-e pishin Taleban' [Girls with colorful dress in university of former Taliban], *BBC Persian Service*, 17 May 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2013/05/130513_k02-extaleban-university-girls.shtml.

⁵⁷ Giustozzi, 'Between Patronage...' [see FN 2], 11.

powerful political groups with narrow agendas and audiences.⁵⁸

Founders of some major institutes are closely associated with the political and ideological interests of neighbouring countries that have for years funded and engaged in proxy armed conflict and ideological rivalry in the country. Promotion of the conservative Wahhabi brand of puritan Islam by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and revolutionary Shiite political Islamism by the Islamic Republic of Iran have for decades been part of the regional rivalry over influence in Afghanistan. The ideological and political rivalry is likely to intensify after 2014, when the Western military and political presence is expected to diminish. The November 2012 announcement of a Saudi plan to build a massive 100 million dollar religious complex, including a university, has already given rise to concerns of an impending new round of political and ideological rivalry over the future of the country.⁵⁹ Iranian Universities including Payame-e Nur and Danishgah-e Azad Islami have already opened branches in Kabul.

Politicisation of higher education is, however, neither a recent nor a rare phenomenon in the country. As noted above, since the 1960s, higher education institutes have been a breeding ground for various radical leftist, Islamist and nationalist groups. Some fear that private institutes of higher education can give rise to a new generation of controversial political and ideological protagonists. A deputy chancellor of a secular institute asserted that “some private institutes are the forerunners of another coalition of seven to eight parties” referring to the seven and eight main mujahedin factions based in Pakistan and Iran, respectively, in the 1980s.⁶⁰

Since 2001, MoHE and academic authorities at state universities have actively discouraged political activities. Official legislation does not legally ban politics at the university campuses, and official

opposition to political activism seems to be driven mainly by a fear of resurgence in student activism akin to the 1960s. In practice, the official ban has only deprived the students of a “legitimate space to learn politics.”⁶¹ Traditional political factions as well as new groups of varying ideological orientation have actively recruited among students. One way political leaders have sought to patronise the emerging educated class is by providing lodging facilities to students from rural backgrounds. A number of “anti-Western and anti-government militant groups are winning the increasing support” among the students.⁶² For obvious reasons, these radical and conservative groups have been adopting underground methods. An opinion survey of Kabul University students found that while most students are “aligned with the international community’s political and security goals, many of them are ambivalent or hostile towards actions.”⁶³ What is clear is that many student groups are closely linked to outside political groups of all kinds. The influence of external political forces in state universities highlights the acute vulnerability of private institutes, many of which are established by political groups.

Third, the risk becomes more of a concern when institutes are also used as centres of indoctrination for extremist ideologies, such as puritan Islam preached by the Jamiat-e Islah Wa Inkeshaf-e Ejtama-yi Afghanistan. In addition to more-known groups such as Hezb-e Islami and the Taleban, other less visible but more radical groups have also been

⁶¹ Giustozzi, ‘Between Patronage...’ [see FN 2].

⁶² Urs Schrade, ‘Afghanistan: Confronting University Trouble Makers’, *EurasiaNet*, 8 May 2013, accessed March 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66946>.

⁶³ Norine MacDonald, ‘Afghanistan Transition and Kabul University: Winning Minds and Losing Hearts’, International Council on Security and Development (ICOS), May 2011, <http://www.icosgroup.net/static/reports/kabul-university.pdf>. Another survey in 2011 asked students of Kabul University and selected other universities in Kabul their views on a range of social issues. The survey did not cover student views on politics but revealed interesting patterns of opinion among university students in Kabul. Heinrich Boll Stiftung (HBS) and Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organization (HREVO), ‘Kabul’s Educated Youth: What Kind of Future?’, September 2012, <http://www.boell.de/de/content/kabuls-educated-youth-what-kind-future>.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mahmud Dastgir, Vice-Chancellor, Kardan University, Kabul, 10 January 2013.

⁵⁹ Emma Graham-Harrison, ‘Saudi Arabia funding \$100m Kabul mosque and education centre’, *The Guardian*, 2 November 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/02/saudi-arabia-funding-kabul-mosque>.

⁶⁰ Interview with a deputy chancellor of a private institute, Kabul, 10 January 2013.

recruiting among students of higher education in recent years. These include the Hezb ut-Tahrir,⁶⁴ a radical transnational Islamist movement that advocates the restoration of the Caliphate system throughout the Islamic world. Hezb ut-Tahrir is banned in much of the Middle East and South and Central Asia and its activities have been the subject of controversy in a number of Western countries. In recent years, it has stepped up its activities apparently with significant successes in Kabul and other urban centres. Though it claims to be a non-violent organisation, in its opposition to the U.S.-led military intervention and at times open sympathy with the Taliban insurgency, the group leaves only a thin line between its proclaimed peaceful Islamic activism and a tendency towards violent armed struggle.⁶⁵

5. CONCLUSION

The dramatic expansion of higher education in recent years has turned it into a strategic sector for the future of the country. The increase in university enrolment rates has created high hopes as well as important risks for the future socio-economic development and political stability of the country. For the first time in its history, Afghanistan is witnessing the rise of a mass educated class. The massification of higher education is accompanied by a 'youth bulge' likely with profound political, security and socio-economic implications. If harnessed and managed well, the increase in desire and energy for learning can open an important avenue for Afghanistan's long-term growth and stability.

Private institutes are at the centre of the challenges as well as the hopes for higher education in Afghanistan. The sheer numerical growth of institutes and students in the private sector clearly demonstrates the capacity of private entrepreneurs

to share the burden of the state universities. The competitive nature of private learning has introduced new technologies, disciplines and teaching methodologies. The risks of such rapid expansion of higher education cannot be underestimated. Its massification occurs at a time of dwindling employment opportunities for university graduates and in a highly uncertain and volatile political environment. The Afghan government lacks both the material and human resources and a long-term strategic vision to effectively regulate the sector. Furthermore, most government officials fail to see the long-term role of university campuses in the 'political socialisation' of their students. University campuses are best seen as microcosm of the country's social and political environment and the expanding educated class as drivers of profound political and socio-economic change.

Lastly, both the state and private institutions of higher learning have a long way to go to attain the necessary level of quality and viability. Numerical growth in recent years is rarely matched by improved quality. The notion of higher learning is largely restricted to teaching in the classroom, and original research that is so central to modern universities is almost non-existent in both the state and private sectors. The rising demand for university enrolment will expand the sector even more, and tens of thousands of graduates will enter the ranks of an expanding intelligentsia. This may come at the cost of quality and the ability of the economy and society to absorb an educated class that is much larger than it has previously experienced.

The institutional and governance structure of the higher education sector clearly needs thorough reform. The MoHE's bureaucratic approach fails to respond to major risks that result from politically and ideologically motivated investment in the sector. Greater allocation of resources, including budgetary and human, is necessary but not enough. A successful reform programme requires greater autonomy of both state and private institutes and a significant shift from the MoHE's current emphasis on bureaucratic control to diverse approaches towards regulating private and state universities. As such, efforts by government officials to impose the rigidly uniform set of educational and bureaucratic standards from Kabul University across the sector may undermine the efforts of the more ambitious and innovative educational entrepreneurs. A new approach also needs to consider models of

⁶⁴ Fazelminallah Qazizai and Chris Sands, 'Afghanistan's New Fundamentalist Players', *Le Monde diplomatique*, June 2013, <http://mondediplo.com/blogs/afghanistan-s-new-fundamentalist-players>.

⁶⁵ See Abbas Daiyar, 'The Growth of Neo-radicalism: Neo-Salafism and Sectarianism', AAN Dispatch, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 25 January 2013, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-growth-of-neo-radicalism-neo-salafism-and-sectarianism>.

partnership between the state and private sector, various forms of collaboration between private and state universities and domestic and international universities. Such partnerships can create opportunities to spread knowledge and expertise from the private to state universities and vice versa and, equally importantly, to increase interactions between the emerging educated youth across the sector.

ANNEX

Table 1. Private Higher Education Institutes and Universities Registered with the Ministry of Higher Education

	Name	Faculties/Programmes	Campus Locations
1	Kardan University	Business Administration	Kabul
		Computer Science	
		Civil Engineering	
		Law	
2	American University of Afghanistan	Computer Science	Kabul
		Business Administration	
		Political Science	
		Social Science	
3	Bakhtar University	Economics	Kabul
		Civil Engineering	
		Journalism	
		Law and Political Science	
		Computer Science	
4	Maiwand Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Kabul
		Computer Science	
5	Kateb University	Social Science	Kabul
		Political Science	
		Computer Science	
		Medicine	
		Economics	
		Law	
6	Chiragh Higher Institute of Medical Education	Medicine	Kabul
7	Maryam Institute of Higher Education	Business Administration	Kabul
		Computer Science	
8	Khatemul Nabeine University	Fiqh (Islamic Law) and Law	Kabul and Ghazni
		Political Science and Sociology	
		Computer Science	
		Medicine	
		Medical Technology	
		Economics	
9	Pishgam Institute of Higher Education	Business Administration	Kabul
		Computer Science	
10	Rana Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
		Computer Science	
11	Dawat University	Civil Engineering	Kabul and Khost
		Law and Political Science	
		Sharaiat (Islamic Law)	
		Journalism	
		Pharmacy	
		Economics	
12	Dunya University	Computer Science	Kabul
		Law and Political Science	

		Economics	
13	Salam Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Kabul and Kunduz
		Sharaiat (Islamic Law)	
		Law and Political Science	
		Computer Science	
		Economics	
14	Tabesh Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul, Maidan Wardak
		Economics	
		Journalism	
		Law	
15	Karwan Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul
		Economics	
		Computer Science	
16	Mashal Institute of Higher Education	Political Science	Kabul
		Business Administration	
		Journalism	
17	Khana-e Noor Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Kabul
		Computer Science	
18	Gharjestan Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul and Farah
		Computer Science	
		Business Administration	
		Economics	
19	Sunshine Institute of Higher Education	Computer Science	Kabul and Khost
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	
20	Ibne Sina Institute of Higher Education	Law	Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif
		Business Administration	
		Social Sciences	
		International Relations	
		Civil Engineering	
		English Translation	
		Political Science	
21	Iran Azad Islamic University	Civil Engineering	Iran and Kabul
		Business Administration	
		International Relations	
		Criminal Law	
22	Goharshad Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul
		Engineering	
		Economics and Management	
		Financial Accounting and Business Administration	
23	Azhar Institute of Higher Education	Education	Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
24	Kaboora Institute of Higher Education	Pharmacy	Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	
25	Khowarazmy Institute of Higher Education	Computer Science	Kabul
		Political Science	
		Economics	
26	Jame al-Mustafa Institute of Higher Education	Not available	Iran and Kabul
27	Payame Noor University	Not available	Iran and Kabul

28	Maihan Institute of Higher Education	Medical Technology	Kabul
		Stomatology	
		Pharmacy	
29	Oroaj Institute of Higher Education	Law	Kabul
		Economics	
30	Rabea Balkhi Institute of Higher Education	Law	Kabul
		Economics	
31	Afghan Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Kabul
		Islamic Law	
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	
32	Sayed Jamaludin Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul
		Economics	
33	Technology and Sustainable Development Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Kabul
		Disaster management, Computer Science	
34	Meli Institute of Higher Education	Medical	Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
35	Afghan Swiss Institute of Higher Education	Medicine	Kabul
		Stomatology	
36	Omol Qora Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Kabul
		Law	
37	Zawul Institute of Higher Education	Medicine	Kabul
		Law	
38	Istiqamat Institute of Higher Education	Engineering	Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
39	Jahan Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
40	Afghanistan Institute of Private Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul
41	Istiqlal Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul
		Engineering	
		Computer Science	
		Economics	
42	Swiss UMF University	Business Administration	Switzerland and Kabul
43	Ahl-Bait Institute of Higher Education	Law	Iran and Kabul
44	Fanus Institute of Higher Education	Journalism and Communication	Kabul
		Economics	
		Law and Political Science	
45	Bamika Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kabul
46	Mowlana Jalaludin Balkhi Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Balkh and Samangan
		Education	
		Medicine	
		Economic	
		Journalism	

47	Saadat Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Balkh
		Islamic Law	
		Computer Science	
48	Arya University	Medical	Balkh
		Law and Political Science	
		Civil Engineering	
		Computer Science	
		Economic	
49	Taj Institute of Higher Education	Medical	Balkh
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	
50	Raah-e Saadat Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Balkh
		Engineering	
		Economics	
		Education	
51	Khurasan University	Economics	Nangrahar
		Computer Science	Nangrahar and Kabul
		Social Sciences	
		Civil Engineering	
52	Speenghar Institute of Higher Education	Medicine	Nangrahar
		Stomatology	
		Medical Technology	
53	Aryana Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Nangrahar and Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
		Medicine	
		Economics	
54	Alfallah Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Nangrahar
		Islamic Law	
		Law and Political Science	
		Civil Engineering	
		Journalism	
55	Roshan Institute of Higher Education	Medical	Nangrahar
		Pharmacy	
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	
56	Altaqwa Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Nangrahar
		Economic	
57	Ishraq Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Herat
		Civil Engineering	
		Literature	
		Psychology	
		Islamic Law	
		Economics	
58	Ghaleb Institute of Higher Education	Medicine	Herat and Kabul
		Law and Political Science	
		Stomatology	
		Economics	
		Computer Science	
59	Jami Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Herat
		Economics	

		Law and Political Science	
		Islamic Law	
		Agriculture	
60	Asia Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Herat
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	
61	Khwaja Abdullah Ansaari Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Herat
		Engineering	
		Social Science	
		Computer Science	
62	Alghaias Institute of Higher Education	Islamic Law	Herat
		Law and Political Science	
63	Kakhkashan-e Sharq Institute of Higher Education	Language and Literature	Herat
		Economics	
		Law and Political Science	
64	Naser Khesrow Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Day Kundi
		Economics	
		Civil Engineering	
		Education	
65	Pameer Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Khost
		computer Science	
		Law and Political Science	
		English Language and Literature	
66	Ahmad Shah Abdally Institute of Higher Education	Medical	Khost
67	Barak Institute of Higher Education	Law	Nimroz
		Economics	
68	Dorokhshan Institute of Higher Education	Law	Faryab
		Economics	
69	Reshad Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Faryab
		Law and Political Science	
70	Wadi Helmand Institute of Higher Education	General Medical	Helmand
		Law	
71	Arakozya Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Helmand
		Law	
72	Boast Institute of Higher Education	Civil Engineering	Helmand
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	
73	Nawayee Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Jawzjan
		Economics	
		Construction	
74	Mirwais Neeka Institute of Higher Education	Medical	Kandahar
		Law	Kandahar
75	Malalai Institute of Higher Education	Medical	
		Law and Political Science	
76	Danesh Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Parwan
		Law and Political Science	
77	Hakim Sanaye Institute of Higher Education	Medical	Baghlan
		Law and Political Science	
		Economics	

78	Fajrestaan Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Takhar
		Engineering	
		Economics	
79	Rah-e Saadat Institute of Higher Education	Economics	Takhar
		Education	
		Law and Political Science	
		Engineering	
80	Khan-e Danish Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Takhar
81	Barna Institute of Higher Education	Law	Badakhshan
		Economics	
82	Tanweer Institute of Higher Education	Law and Political Science	Kunar
		Economics	
Source: Based on lists posted at the Ministry of Higher Education's English and Dari websites. Accessed 19 March 2014, http://www.mohe.gov.af/?p=private and http://www.mohe.gov.af/?lang=en&p=private			

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