INSPIRE

Innovative Governance Practices in
the Higher Education Institutions in Iraq

A diagnostic tool to assess governance

This document provides a general description of the diagnostic tool which will be used in the framework of the INsPIRE project to assess governance dimensions at the Iraqi HEIs. The main dimensions, subdimensions and indicators of governance are reported and explained, in relation to each strategic activity of the university, namely teaching, research and third mission.

The tool enables the identification of the preliminary training needs at the level of dimensions and subdimensions for improving governance arrangements, and allows universities to conduct a self-evaluation of current governance arrangements at the level of basic indicators.

The results of the combination of these two steps may help each HEI to drive the organizational changes required to improve governance systems.

General structure

The tool used in INsPIRE is an adaptation of the Diagnostic Tool developed by the coordinating institution, the University of Siena, for the project UNIGOV, Improving Governance Practices and Palestinian Higher Education Institutions. The UNIGOV project has developed in the framework of the WP1 Preparation and desk research, a governance diagnostic tool to provide a clear understanding about the current practices of university governance in the Palestine universities members of the consortium. The tool has been developed by the DISAG Department of the University of Siena who was the leader of the WP1, Preparation and desk research (https://www.unisi.it/dipartimenti/dipartimento-studi-aziendali-e-giuridici).

The Diagnostic Tool has been developed based on the findings of the literature review and the HEI governance models analyzed, it is designed as a matrix where the horizontal axis shows the strategic activities of each HEI (TEACHING, RESEARCH and the so- called THIRD MISSION) while the vertical axis shows the different dimensions (AUTONOMY, ACCOUNTABILITY, MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES and PARTICIPATION) and subdimensions characterizing the issue of governance.

In the framework of the INsPIRE project, the Diagnostic Tool has been adapted into an online questionnaire using a digital tool for data collection, to facilitate the filling of information on behalf of the Iraqi partners and ease the analysis of statistical data on behalf of the UNIMED team, responsible for the Work Package 1 Update of Needs Analysis. The rationale behind the tool has been maintained, structuring the questionnaire to allow an assessment of each governance dimension in relation to each strategic activity.

How will the self-assessment take place

Due to the difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic which has prevented the researchers to travel to Iraq, the self-assessment exercise must be conducted online. UNIMED has arranged bilateral meetings with each institution to conduct the self-assessment with ongoing real-time support to immediately clarfiy doubts and ensure a correct interpretation of concepts and information. The current document complement the preparation of the self-evaluation, providing Partners with a guidance in the process.

The self-assessment is conducted in different steps:

1) First Partners are asked to prioritize goverance dimensions, to allow for the creation of a wheight system and the identification of the aspects deemed more relevant (priority factors)
2) Second, the self-evaluation is conducted online by each Partner University in Iraq, involving 8 to 10 staff members covering strategic roles at the university, such as: the Rector, two Vice-Rectors, the General Director in charge for administrative and financial management, the Director of the International Relations office, the Director of the Quality Assurance office, Director of the department of Studies and Planning, Director of the Finance department. The self-assessment is conducted on 3 governance dimensions (AUTONOMY, MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES, ACCOUNTABILITY), with subdimensions and specific indicators.
3) An assessment of the PARTICIPATION dimension is carried out, which allows the identification of relevant stakeholders in relation to each specific dimension and activity, resulting in a stakeholder's map describing to what extent these stakeholders take part in the institutional life.

Governance dimensions under examination

The following figure illustrates a general overview of the strategic activities and dimensions of each HEI. HEI activities have traditionally been understood as having two missions: **teaching and research**. In recent decades, HEIs have moved from focusing exclusively on these two missions, to be considered as key actors of economic and cultural growth, transforming themselves into institutions engaged with industry and society at large. For this reason, the concept of **'third mission'** emerged.

The concept of 'third mission' has a broad meaning, covering all those requirements that call for HEIs to play a much more visible and stronger role in the design of modern knowledge societies by providing socially, culturally and economically usable knowledge. Many different activities are included in the definition of 'third mission', with the focus on three main areas:

a) HEI-economy interaction in a broad sense, with relations with different stakeholders from the economic environment (technology transfer and innovation);

b) Social engagement and knowledge transfer: interactions between HEIs and society (such as museum management, dissemination activities, cultural events) with the aim of bringing about benefits for society;

c) Placement mechanisms for graduated students (e.g. student follow up, placement offices).

Activities and dimensions

Source: Elaboration of the University of Siena
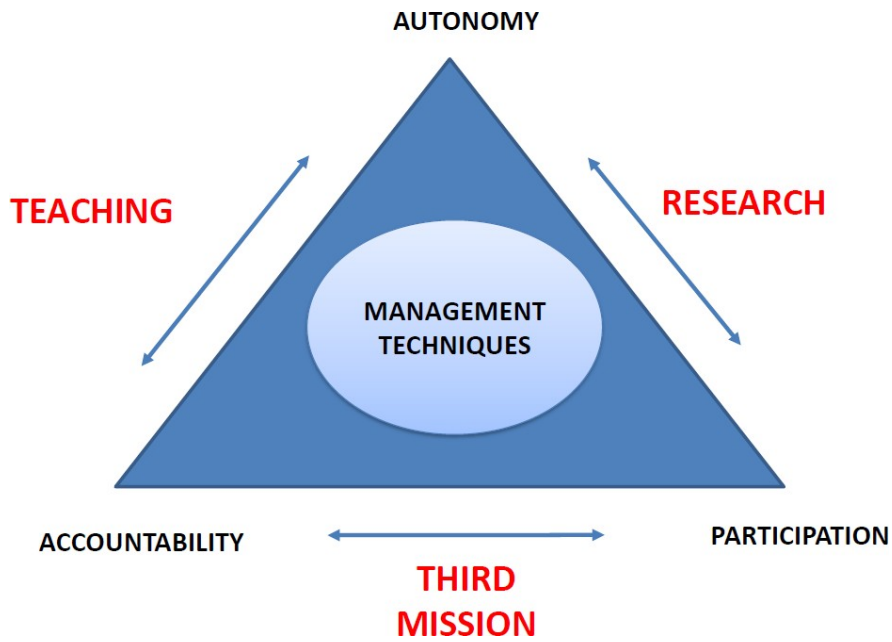
The three strategic activities should be examined across the governance dimensions identified: Autonomy, Management Techniques, Accountability. Each dimension covers separate aspects that are interrelated with each other but should be examined in a separate way .

DIMENSION	DIMENSION	DIMENSION	DIMENSION
AUTONOMY	ACCOUNTABILITY	MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES	PARTICIPATION
To what extent the HEI is able to decide freely in relation to the central authority	To what extent the HEI is accountable to Or is held to be accountable by stakeholders	To what extent the HEI is able to effectively use managerial tools	To what extent stakeholders are engaged in strategic decision making

Each dimension is broken down into a number of subdimensions, each one highlighting a specific aspect related to the university governance. For the specific purpose of the self-assessment for the INsPIRE project, the following subdimensions are taken in consideration:

GOVERNANCE DIMENSIONS	SUBDIMENSIONS
AUTONOMY	Organizational autonomy
	Academic autonomy
	Autonomy in decision-making about Human Resources
	Financial autonomy
MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES	Definition of Quality Assurance mechanisms
	Effective use of Performance planing tools
	Effective use of Evaluation results
ACCOUNTABILITY	Organizational accountability
	Academic accountability
	Human Resources accountability
	Financial accountability

Each subdimension provides specific indicators that should be investigated during the self-evaluation step. Indicators serve to point-out different tasks, activities or bodies to which dimensions relate to. The following sections provide a detailed description of dimensions, subdimensions and specific indicators.

The self-evaluation of current governance arrangements will be realized at the level of the basic indicators, according to the a scale 1 to 5, where 1 is low and 5 is high. There is no right or wrong answer in the self-assessment, but it is a collection of perceptions on behalf of the university staff members.

Autonomy dimension

Autonomy concerns the relationship between each HEI and the central authority. It measures how freely HEIs can take decisions in the context of the rules and regulations that shape each higher education system. Autonomy can be examined according to four subdimensions:

Dimensions	Meaning	Subdimensions	Meaning
AUTONOMY	To what extent the HEIs is able to decide freely in relation to the central authority	Organisational	It refers to the degree of freedom in decision making on institution internal organisation.
		Academic	It refers to the degree of freedom in decision making on academic issues.
		Human resources	It refers to the degree of freedom in decision making on human resources management (HRM).
		Financial	It refers to the degree of freedom in decision making on financial issues.

Organisational autonomy

This encompasses two main aspects: governance and leadership model, and organisation of the internal structures at the university. It refers to the degree of autonomy of the institution in deciding upon its internal organizations, the function and composition of governing bodies, the selection and dismissal criteria for the members involved in the governing bodies.

The subdimensions and related indicators investigate to what extent national regulation have a say in the definition of the organizational aspects at the HEI and / or whether each HEI can define its own internal regulation about the organizational structure.

Academic autonomy

It refers to the degree of freedom in taking decisions on acadmic issues, in relation to the three strategic activities of the institution. Academic indicators with reference to teaching activity refer to the decisions on the overall number of students, student's selection, introduction of new programs, design of course content and the choice of the language of instruction.

Academic indicators with reference to research activity are those reletated to the autonomy in deciding upon the defintion of research programs and the acquisition of research tool and tehcnical

instruments (such as instruments for laboratories or software) that can be regulated by the central authority or freely managed by institutions.

Indicators in relation to the university Third Mission refer to the decisions related to the socio-economic activities managed by HEIs (such as museum management or medical laboratories, dissemination activities, etc), student follow-up mechanisms (mechanisms to monitor the employment of students after graduation), set-up of student placement office (office that offers students career advices and help in finding employment) that can be regulated by the central authority or freely managed by institutions. Central authorities may impose which kind of activities can be pursued or may impose time limits to these activities.

Human resources autonomy

Autonomy in decision-making about human resources management relates to the freedom in taking decisions about HR management. Indicators relate to human resources management for both academic and administrative staff. HR can be managed according to a strong dedicated regulation decided by national law and central administrative levels or can be freely managed according to internal rules (subject only to national labour regulation). Indicators relate to salaries and dismissal for academic and adminitrative staff involved in both teaching and research activities. For 'third mission' activities, the central authority may impose time limits for staff involvement or the decision may be at the institutional level, depending on the degree of autonomy granted to the university in decision.

Financial autonomy

Financial autonomy relates to the capcity of university to take autonomous decision in financial matters. Financial indicators refer to financial resources that can be provided by a central authority or can be freely obtained on the market through competitions mechanisms. The degree of autonomy related to financial resources (both for the typology of eligible funds and for resource allocation) may vary for the different activities of HEIs and include the capacity of the institution to attract funds.

Management techniques dimension

The management techniques dimension is related to the use of managerial tools for the governance and management of the overall organisation, tools which are supposed to replace, whenever possible, a bureaucratic approach linked to formal procedure fulfilment rather than result achievement. A well- developed management system should be aligned to strategic goals, that should in turn reflect social needs. The translation of mission and strategic goals into evaluable objectives and actions leads to possibility to assess the impacts of activities. From a practical point of view, the dimension is broken down into three subdimensions, each step being closely integrated with the others and the overall managerial approach.

The subdimensions related to Management techniques are the following:

Dimension	Meaning	Subdimensions	Meaning
MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES	To what extent the HEis is able to effectively use managerial tools	Definition of Quality Assurance mechanisms	If refers to the degree of effectiveness in setting and quality procedures
		Effective use of performance planning tools	It refers to the degree of effetiveness in the use of planning tools
		Effective use of evaluation results	It refers to the degree of effetiveness in the use of evaluation results for decision-making

Management techniques – Quality assurance system

Quality assurance system refers to the use of standard procedures for managing the overall institutional system, both according to international standards and to the regulations of the national agency for accreditation and quality. In this section, the analysis focuses on the definition of criteria and procedures for quality assurance, to create standards to be used for all the activities carried out by HEIs (ex-ante).

Quality assurance system indicators with reference to teaching activities refer to the use of standard procedures for evaluation of academic courses and teaching methodologies, and for the evaluation of other academic issues such as student services and student performance.

Quality assurance system indicators with reference to research activities refer to the use of standard procedures for the design of research prgrams, and the acquisition of technical instruments and tools.

Quality assurance system indicators with reference to the university's Third Mission refer to the use of standard procedures for the realization of socioeconomic activities, for the students' follow-up, and the students' placement office management.

Management techniques – Performance planning tools

The evaluation on the planning system refers to the degree of effectiveness in the use of planning tools for the activities of the institution. Indicators refer to the effective use of planning tools in relation to the three core activities of the university, teaching research and third mission, such as the capacity to effectively desgin strategic documents with short-term and long-term goals, and the capacity to design effective budget documents with short-term operational goals.

Management techniques – Evaluation results

It refers to the degree of effetiveness in the use of evaluation results for decision-making (ex-post). Indicators refer to the effective use of the results of performance evaluations tot realise a fair and coherent decision-making process, both on insitutional overall performance and on individual employees. The evaluation should be based on the quality procedures and quality criteria set up by the quality assurance system.

Accountability dimension

The basic meaning of accountability can be outlined as an account-giving relation between individuals or organisations. In a public sector context, it plays a decisive role because it counterbalances the delegation of power from the central autority to institutions.

The more a system is centralized, the more institutions are less accountable – they simply comply with the decisions of the central authority. The more a system is decentralized, the more institutions must be accountable or held accountable for their own decisions. As long as universities gain autonomy from a central authority, they need to be accountable, i.e. responsible for their own decisions. Accountability also plays a fundamental role for private HEIs because of the competition mechanisms in relation to both resources acquisition and student (customer) satisfaction.

The dimension measures the degree to which the HEI is accountable to or is held to be accountable by stakeholders. It measures to what extent the institution is able to take responsibility and ensure transparency for the decisions taken.

The subdimensions related to Accountability are the following:

Dimensions	Meaning	Subdimensions	Meaning
ACCOUNTABILITY	To what extent the HEi is accountable to or is held to be accountable by stakeholders	Organisational	It refers to the degree of effectiveness in being accountable to or in being held to be accountable by stakeholders in organisational topics.
		Academic	It refers to the degree of effectiveness in in being accountable to or in being held to be accountable by stakeholders in academic topic.
		Human resources	It refers to the degree of effectiveness in being accountable to or in being held to be accountable by stakeholders in HR topic.
		Financial	It refers to the degree of effectiveness in being accountable to or in being held to be accountable by stakeholders in financial topic

Organisational accountability

It refers to the degree of effectiveness in being accountable on organisational issues, especially on those decisions about the organizational structure of the institution, the functioning of governing bodies and the compliance with the Mission and Vision of the instituion and the planning documents (i.e. strategic plans and goals). It applies in the same way to teaching, research and TM activities.

Academic accountability

This refers to the degree of effectiveness in being accountable for the decisions taken on academic issues. Academic indicators with reference to teaching refer to student performance, the provision and effectiveness of student services, the academic workload.

Academic indicators with reference to research activities refer to the accountability for research results (e.g. number publications/year, ranking publication/year) and the acquisition of research tools and technical instruments.

Academic indicators with reference to Third Mission of the university refer to the decisions taken on setting-up socioeconomic activities (e.g. museum management or dissemination activities), student follow-up, and the outcome of the students' placement office work.

Human resources accountability

Accountability in relation to human resources refers to the capacity of institutions to be accountable for the decisions taken in managing their staff, with a specific attetion towards the disemissal and promotion of both academic and adminitrative staff, as well as the implementation of punitive sanctions against unethical behavious.

Financial accountability

Accountability in financial matters refer to the capacity of institutions to be accountable for the decisions about funds allocation, budget sources and the debt level of the university. It strongly relates to the financial autonomy: the more the university is independent in taking decisions about financial allocation and funds sources, the more it is accountable for these decisions. The more a system is centralized, the more university have a low degree of accountability on specific financial decisions because these are taken directly by the central authority.

Participation dimension

Participation means the engagement of stakeholders in the overall HEI governance system. Different stakeholders can influence the decision-making process: internal stakeholders, meaning those internal at the institution; and external stakeholders, meaning those acting in the environment in which the university operates.

According to R. Edward Freeman, a stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives". The study uses the concept of stakeholder to mean all those bodies that have an interest in the activities of the given organisation. Stakeholders have been considered as those organisations, networks and private people who are able to influence the objectives and activities of the organisation (Kettunen 2014).

From this perspective, a first general distinction is made between internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are those having a direct impact on the HEI, while external stakeholders have a more indirect impact on the institutional life. Another dinstinction must be made: internal stakeholder serve the institution and contribute to it activities, while external stakeholders are influenced by the work and activities of the institution.

The full list of internal and external stakeholders included in the current assessment is:

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	Students
	Students' union
	Alumni
	Professors
	Administrative staff
EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	Ministry of Higher Education
	Central quality department
	Local authorities
	Private sector
	Research institutes
	Donors
	International organizations
	European Union
	NGOs

The participation dimension examine the role and the degree of impact for each internal and external stakeholder in relation to teaching, research and Third Mission activities. It measure the degree of engagement and participation of stakeholders in the institutional governance, in the decision-making process and in the evaluation of the outcomes of university activities.

The Diagnostic tool enables the realisation of a stakeholder map assessing the level of participation of each actor on the university functioning. This is complemented by a preliminary assessment of the importance and influence of each stakeholder on the institution (prioritization).

The stakeholder map can be used to describe the most important stakeholders of the institution. After the institution has identified its stakeholders, it can evaluate stakeholder relationships and develop them in a systematic manner following the principle of continuous improvement.

Assessment results

The UNIMED research team will collect a minimum of 8 to 10 questionnaire from each institution. A first analysis will be made to have a comprehensive picture for each institution, weighting answers upon the priority factors identified at the very beginning, and resulting in an average of the answers collected for each university. A second anaysis will be conducted through a comparison of the results for the 10 institutions, to identify training needs and those governance dimensions and subdimensions in need of extra attention in the future instutional developments.