

## Iraq Market Report

### Visit to Jordan – April 05 Richard Truscott

#### Purpose of Visit:

- To attend the Rebuild Iraq Conference & Exhibition in Amman, Jordan
- To scope the ELT requirements in Iraq during the country's reconstruction
- To advance the ELT project for the Iraq Ministry of Oil through the Iraq/UK Joint Learning Board

#### Context

The past 12 months has seen a considerable focus on Iraq and the potential for UK exporters to assist in the post-war reconstruction of the country. Government bodies, UK industry and UK education and training providers have launched initiatives in partnership with Iraqi counterparts. UK Trade & Investment has a desk dedicated to the country and the British Council has returned to Iraq for the first time since 1991. Although because of security issues the Council office is located in Amman in Jordan, Adrian Chadwick, Director British Council Iraq, spends extensive periods in Iraq and has built up a good network of high level contacts.

In the UK the British Universities Iraq Consortium is currently supporting improvements in the Iraqi higher education system. The Association of Colleges is delivering a programme to assist the technical education sector in Iraq. The Iraq/UK Joint Learning Board was set up to monitor and drive Iraqi-UK efforts in education, training and development in the Iraq Ministry of Oil.

It has been recognised that a major obstacle to almost all the development plans for Iraq is the common lack of English language competency. One of the greatest requirements identified by UNESCO is for Iraq to become internationalised, an objective which has English language as a cornerstone. The older generation of Iraqis, educated before the period of isolation, by and large has a very high level of English language competency. It is at middle management and technician level that the requirement for English training is greatest. This need is widespread across all the ministries in Iraq.

#### Rebuild Iraq 2005 Exhibition & Conference

A large-scale exhibition in Amman, Jordan, Rebuild Iraq attracted around 1000 exhibitors from 50 countries. Each nationality had its own zone – the UK area co-ordinated by UKTI and BESA with a focus on education and training. The UK side involved 60 representatives from the Department for Education and Skills, the British Council, UK Trade and Investment, the Association of Colleges, the British Universities Iraq Consortium, UK colleges, a Sector Skills Council, the Publishers Association, English UK, and companies supplying equipment, books, and services to the education and training sector. Two English UK members attended the exhibition and conference in addition to the association's stand.

The main focus of the event for UK participants was a conference organised by BESA - *The Iraq UK Partnership Conference in Higher and Further Education*. The aim was to review the relationships between Iraq and the UK in further and higher education and to discuss ways of developing future policies, programmes, and projects. It was accompanied by a series of subject area workshops organised to meet the requirements of Iraqi institutions, including English language training. The conference involved 210 delegates from Iraq, including representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education (led by Dr Idris Salih, Deputy Minister of Higher Education & Scientific Research), the Foundation of Technical Education (led by Dr Mahmoud Abdhussain, President), and from universities, technical institutes, and technical colleges across Iraq. UNESCO was also represented.

Feedback both from the exhibition and the conference points to a huge requirement for ELT but with considerable constraints in those needs being met:

- **Location**  
There is no possibility of delivery in Iraq for the foreseeable future. Ministries and other institutions regard it as impossible for their staff to travel to the UK in the large numbers or for the long periods that would be required. Frequent requests were for ELT to be delivered in Jordan.
- **Type of delivery**  
Linked to the point above, the most favoured option for ELT delivery is through “train the trainer” models with a subsequent cascade to large numbers of Iraqi employees taught by trained Iraqis.
- **Visas**  
There exists at least the perception that visas for the UK are very difficult to procure. A number of refusals have given the stated reason that English language courses are available in Jordan at a lower cost than in the UK. Discussions with visa authorities in Jordan (where visa applications are processed) suggested that refusals are largely because of poorly prepared applications. It was accepted that availability of ELT locally was no reason to refuse a study visa application.
- **Funding**  
With the exception of the Ministry of Oil, much of Iraq’s reconstruction is being funded by aid received from donor countries. There is therefore a widespread expectancy that training, including language training, be provided free with the costs borne by donor governments and institutions. UK aid is channelled through DFID and is not focused on language training requirements.  
Even where budgets are held by Iraqi ministries and institutions, the amounts are calculated in millions/billions of dollars and are aimed at large-scale projects. Budgets have yet to be devolved to the level where thousands of pounds are spent on the type and scale of projects which would include ELT.

Specific requests were made for English training in the areas of medicine, business, hotel management and catering as well as teacher training – particularly methodology and curriculum design. The leads in these areas have been passed to appropriate English UK members. Although there was interest in sending students to the UK, in many instances this would appear to be aspirational rather than realistic.

### **Scoping ELT requirements in Iraq**

Discussions with Richard Hardiman, First Secretary Commercial at the British Embassy in Baghdad has led to an agreement for him to assist with establishing the ELT requirements in five target ministries: Health, Municipalities & Public Works, Defence, Communications and Transport. Now that ministers have been appointed, a paper will be sent to RH to forward to the appropriate ministry contacts to conduct a broad needs analysis. It is likely that ministries will require ELT provision to be tied in with a relevant technical package to improve the skills of employees in addition to their English language competency. This may mean private language schools linking with universities where appropriate to deliver the non-ELT options.

### **ELT project for the Iraq Ministry of Oil through the Iraq/UK Joint Learning Board**

The Iraq/UK Joint Learning Board comprises UK representatives from BP, Schlumberger, Shell, UK Trade & Investment, Cogent, Imperial College London, Foster Wheeler and the British Council. The Board is committed to working with the Ministry of Oil in Iraq to develop the industry during the country’s reconstruction. As part of this commitment there is a requirement to train up to 24 Iraqi employees of the Ministry in English language teaching and ICT skills.

The Board has been in communication with the Iraq Ministry of Oil for a number of months and English UK has been involved in drawing up the specification and tender document for the project. Tender bids were requested from six English UK members who have expertise both in teacher training and in the oil and gas industry. The programmes will be delivered in

the UK with the first course for eight trainees beginning in June 2005. They will be funded by members of the Joint Learning Board.

## **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that a huge requirement for ELT exists in Iraq. Discussions with ministry representatives during the visit to Jordan show that this requirement is widespread throughout the ministries and other institutions with a particular focus on English for specific purposes in the fields of science, medicine and administration. Kurdish Iraq appears to be particularly focused on internationalisation. The main concern is how English UK members can gain access to the market in view of the obstacles described above.

Approaches are further constrained by the restricted access to information technology in Iraq. Dr Idris Saleh, Deputy Minister of Higher Education & Scientific Research, estimates a computer ratio of 1:30 students. He reports very few internet or intranet networks and a consequent inability to communicate with global universities and other partners. The Ministry is currently being funded at \$25m per month but all funds are targeted at physical reconstruction with no money available for curriculum development or training.

When funds do become available it is likely that ELT will be a high priority. The opportunities for English UK members will be significant but, in the medium term at least, largely restricted to provision in Jordan or neighbouring countries with delivery following the pattern of short courses, perhaps with regular top up/refresher programmes, and "cascade" teacher training. Leads from the visit to Jordan have been followed up and further contacts will be released to members where an aim to study in the UK is considered to be realistic. It is likely that the great majority of students who are sent by their ministries to study in the UK will attend programmes as part of a group rather than as individuals.

## **Acknowledgments**

English UK is grateful to UK Trade & Investment for their support for the visit to Jordan and to BESA for organising the Iraq/UK Partnership Conference.

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April 2005