

**Suggested Envisioning & Restructuring of**

**A PROPOSAL FOR A DIPLOMA COURSE  
IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**For**

**SUPREME COUNCIL FOR FAMILY AFFAIRS  
&  
UNIVERSITY OF QATAR**

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## **PREAMBLE**

The proposed diploma program in special education will initiate teacher preparation in special education at the University of Qatar. The Supreme Council for Family Matters and the University of Qatar have every right to be complimented on their decision to launch a specialist teacher preparation program to support the education of Qataris with special needs. This is a foresighted initiative with implication for both the immediate present and the future.

While this report focuses on the immediate need to implement the diploma program, it would be remiss of the consultants if they were not to place such an initiative within the international context of education of persons with special needs. It is only within this context that this program, its implication for the future, and its relationship to the wider education system for all students can be evaluated.

Nations with a lengthy history of experience in education of children and youth with special needs have witnessed continual change as new understandings of the needs and abilities of persons with disabilities have been clarified by experience and research.

All nations began, as has Qatar, with provision of services through special schools. A number of other nations are similar to Qatar in that this type of provision has been the single type of service until recent years. Nations with longer histories in the field have retained a degree of dependency on special schools, but have differentiated their special education systems over the years. This differentiation has resulted, in countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the Scandinavian nations, and Italy, in placement of many students with special needs in regular school environments. First, groups of students with the same category of challenge or ability (e.g. developmental delay, giftedness, learning disability, hearing impairment) were grouped as a small class in a regular school environment with a specially trained teacher. Next, as it became apparent that some of these students were capable of dealing successfully with a modified regular class curriculum, numbers were placed for part of the school day in a special class and part of the school day in a regular class with regular class non-disabled peers. This is referred to as partial integration. The success of this endeavour led to full-time placement of some students with disabilities in regular classrooms, possibly being withdrawn for short periods for special instruction by trained teachers of special education. Today, few students are placed in special schools. The great majority are placed on a part-time or full-time basis in the regular classes of mainstream schools. In such instances, the regular classroom teacher is supported by a trained special education teacher and possibly by an in-classroom teaching assistant.

Parents are encouraged to collaborate with teachers in planning a total home-school program for the students. Governments have been active in developing policy and

passing legislation supporting participation of children and youth with exceptionalities in regular school and regular classroom environments.

It may well be that Qatar will find itself being encouraged to follow a similar path. If so, the nation, already having initiated an innovative preparation program for generalist special education teachers, will be well placed to do so.

The following discussion will examine general aspects of the proposed diploma program in special education. Comments will be made with regard to suggested restructuring of aspects of the program.

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of the proposed diploma program is to provide adequate instruction and training for potential leaders in special education, which will enable them to engage in professional activities, and which are responsive to and will meet special needs of individuals with exceptionalities. The program's general emphasis, however, is on providing candidates with a wide range of practical methods for improving the quality of life of individuals with special needs and for helping them achieve their maximum learning potential. *Candidates will emerge from the program as generalists in the education of children and youth with exceptionalities.*

## SPECIFIC AIMS OF THE PROGRAM

1. Provide candidates with a working understanding of concepts and theories pertaining to students with special needs.
2. Equip candidates with skills necessary for the initial identification and evaluation of disabilities.
3. Train candidates on ways and methods of rehabilitation.
4. Enable candidates to provide appropriate counseling services to individuals with special needs, *and to their families.*

## DIPLOMA PROGRAM OUTLINE

*The restructured diploma program consists of 23 credit hours divided into three semesters. Candidates admitted to the program are required to take 11 credit hours in the first semester, 12 in the second semester, and 7 hours of Field Practicum in the third semester. Designated first and second semester courses will have .5 hours of Field Practicum attached to them to a total of 2 credit hours.*

### Semester I

Course #	Title	Credit Hours
1	Introduction to special education	3
2	Development, functional assessment, and initial identification of children & youth with exceptionalities	3 (.5)

*Note: Study of child development is included in this early course in recognition of the importance of studying atypical development against the backdrop of normal development. Assessment and identification are placed early in the program due to the need to be familiar with methods of noting differences resulting in exceptionality and the category of exceptionality involved from the beginning of preparation in this area.*



*Field Practicum time is scheduled to meet the need to observe children and youth in the classroom and school in support of blending theory and practice.*

- 3      *Methods of teaching children and youth challenged by developmental delay and learning disability, including design and creation of media and resources to support teaching.*      3

*Note: This course is placed early in the program due to the need to become familiar with practical teaching methods from an early point and to accumulate knowledge over the entire course of the program. A focus on media is included due to need to supplement the few commercial teaching aids available by teacher made materials.*

- 4      *Screening the development of children and youth with exceptionalities and prescribing interventions.*      3      (.5)

*Note: Screening and prescribing interventions is a skill to be gained over the entire spectrum of the program and must be begun early. The focus on development noted in the second course is continued here. Field Practicum time is allotted in order to permit blending of theory and practice in this important area.*

Credit hours    12    (1.0)

## Semester II

Course #	Title	Credit Hours
5	<i>Methods of teaching children and youth challenged by hearing and visual impairments</i>	2

*Note: Candidates should not be expected to learn sufficient information in these two areas as both call for lengthy training in themselves. However, candidates will be able to familiarize themselves in general with educational treatment of students in these two groups. Such familiarity will be of value in special education situations in general. Participant observation during Field Practicum should be provided.*

- 6      *Methods of identifying and programming for gifted children & youth, including the design and creation of media and resources appropriate for the support of programming.*      3      (.5)

*It has been decided that the initiation of work with students in this category is of sufficient importance to warrant emphasis on the area. Participant observation in settings for gifted students and in regular classrooms is required to support identification and programming.*

7      Counselling individuals with disabilities and their families.      3      (.5)

*Note: This innovation addition to the diploma program is worthy of emphasis. In order to permit observation both in school and home settings, Field Practicum Time is assigned.*

8      Issues in special education      3

*Note: Candidates should exit the course with an understanding of the field of special education as widely understood during this period of new programs, change, and expansion. This course will permit candidates to contextualize all previous learning.*

Credit hours    11    (1.0)

### Semester III

Course #	Title	Credit Hours
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9	Field Practicum	7
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*Total Field Practicum Hours    7    (2.0)*

*Note: There is great need to maximize understanding of Field Practicum experiences through debriefing discussion with colleagues and instructors. Debriefing sessions should be considered part of any course with attached Field Practicum and for the period when other courses do not compliment the Field Practicum.*

*Note: Library resources will require upgrading to meet the needs of the diploma program in special education.*

## **LINKAGES BETWEEN THE DIPLOMA IN SPECIAL EDUCATION & THE DIPLOMA IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

The Supreme Council for Family Affairs and the University of Qatar have taken the bold and appropriate step of launching the Diploma in Special Education and the Diploma in Early Childhood simultaneously. This step presents an opportunity for inter-linkage of the two programs to the advantage of program candidates, those charged with development and implementation of the programs, and the field of education in Qatar in general. Opportunities for reduction of expenditures may be found as well.

- Candidates in both programs will study child development, assessment and evaluation in early childhood, and the design and creation of media and other resources. Consideration should be given to ways to collaborate between the programs in these, and perhaps other, areas. Such collaboration would result in the development of professional relationships between candidates in the two programs, with implication for future cooperation, for participation in both programs by faculty members, and for the sharing of media lab and library resources.
- Consideration of joint participation in the proposed National Family Center in Childhood and Education (actual name undecided) is recommended. This move would recognize that children are children and more alike than different. It also would open up wide possibilities for collaboration and economical use of resources.



## THE FIELD PRACTICUM

Careful, creative, and continuing thought must be paid to development and implementation of the Field Practicum. A number of sites appropriate for Field Practicum use exist. A variety of special education facilities (Al-Shafallah Center, Department of Children's Habilitation school at Hamad Medical Corporation, Mental Education School for Girls, Audio Education School for Boys, and Qatar Centre for the Gifted and Talented) were visited. A visit also was made to the Department of Children's Habilitation at Hamad Medical Corporation. The differential strengths of the first four facilities were commented on in an earlier report. All possessed potential to contribute to the Field Practicum experiences of special education diploma candidates.

- In particular, the Mental Health School for Girls and the Department of Children's Habilitation school are suitable for participant observation and for longer term Field Practicum placements. (1)
- The Al-Shafallah Center would be an appropriate Field Practicum site for participant observation and for targeted Field Practicum placement site. (2)
- The Audio School for Boys is a highly specialized setting. Preparing teachers for teaching duties with children with high degrees of hearing impairment is beyond the scope of the diploma program. However, much can be learned through participant observation at the School which will support diploma program graduates in working with a wide range of students with exceptionalities. (3)
- Though the Department of Children's Habilitation is a medical facility and not a school, targeted periods of observation would be of value. Some children and youth with exceptionalities require occasional or continuing medical attention. Diploma program candidates would benefit from familiarization with the medical model, contact with the range of needs children with exceptionalities have, and the contribution medical staff can make to the life of any individual. (4)
- The Qatari Centre for Gifted and Talented is not yet operational. There is promise, however, that the Centre could become a major contributor to the Field Practicum experiences of diploma program candidates in the area of giftedness. In addition, as the Centre's plan is to support inclusion of its students in their ordinary regular school placements, the opportunity of observing and experiencing an inclusive environment would be available. (5)

Beyond these special education-related practicum sites, opportunity for beneficial experiences may be found in the general community. Placement in community sites are called for in the suggested restructuring of the special education diploma course as discussed above. Such sites would include:



- Ordinary early childhood facilities. Diploma candidates must become familiar with normal developmental patterns in order to recognize and respond to atypical patterns. Periods of participant observation are recommended in such sites. ①
- Similarly, placements in support of familiarity with assessment and screening in regular schools are recommended. Knowledge of performance of regular students when assessed/screened will add to the diploma program candidates overall understanding. ②
- Homes of children and youth with exceptionalities. Students with special needs have a life beyond the school. Diploma program candidates should gain familiarity with family response to disabled young family members in order to obtain a wholistic appreciation of the child. Such experience is called for, in particular, by the course in counseling. ③
- Adults with exceptionalities. Children and youth with exceptionalities will grow into adults with exceptionalities. Again, in order to gain an appreciation of the whole child, diploma program candidates should gain familiarity with adults and their life situations. Targeted Field Practicum experiences with organizations related to exceptionality, places of employment and housing for individuals with exceptionality, and individuals with exceptionality is recommended. ④

## **RATIONALE**

The restructuring suggested above and the preamble are predicated on a number of objectives designed to contextualize and strengthen the diploma program in special education. These are:

1. To place the diploma program within an international context for the information and guidance of decision makers.
2. To recognize the fundamental importance of familiarity with normal development in understanding the development of children & youth with exceptionalities.
3. To allot appropriate numbers of credit hours to areas of more and less intensive study in keeping with probable future responsibilities of graduates for identification, evaluation, and teaching of nominated groups of children & youth with exceptionalities.
4. To permit the blending of theory and practice throughout the program.
5. To permit a widening of Field Practicum in support of content of specific courses calling for understanding of dynamics beyond the special classroom.
6. To facilitate acquisition of skills in design and creation of media and resources to support teaching, particularly in light of the lack of adequate amounts and types of commercially available materials.
7. To align program objectives, course offerings, and Field Practicum in complimentary fashion.
8. To suggest the connection between education of typical students and education of atypical students in recognition of the future possibility of differentiation of educational services for children youth with exceptionalities.
9. To emphasize the reality that a range of professionals work with parents and individuals with disabilities in provision of the strongest possible education for those with exceptionalities.
10. To develop the strongest possible program for generalist educators of children & youth with exceptionalities within the time and resources available.
11. To permit early implementation of the diploma program in special education.



## **GUIDING THE DIPLOMA PROGRAM INTO THE FUTURE**

It would be inappropriate to suggest that Qatari needs in special education can be addressed by adoption of a model of service delivery developed to meet the needs of any other nation. Each nation possesses unique qualities which call for customization of its services.

Nonetheless, in the long term view the introduction of the diploma program must be regarded as one initiative among others yet to be made. Qatar would, in the long term, benefit from a coordinated plan for the education of its citizens with exceptionalities. It is recommended that the Supreme Council for Family Matters and the University of Qatar begin consideration of such a long term plan once the diploma program in special education is in place.

Future possibilities to be considered are:

- Building on the diploma program to develop a Masters degree program in special education.
- Collaboration with early childhood programs in developing integrative/inclusive model programs for children with exceptionalities.
- Working with selected regular schools on the introduction of integration/inclusion on a grade by grade basis beginning with graduates of integrative/inclusive early childhood programs.
- Working toward a national model under which some children attend special facilities, some attend special classes sited in regular schools, and others are integrated/included in regular classes of regular schools.
- Working with family organizations and organizations related to exceptionality to educate the public on the value of strengthening educational programs for citizens with exceptionalities.

During the strengthening of education for all Qatari citizens with exceptionalities phase, the advice and guidance of authorities from outside Qatar may be of value. If such a path is followed, it is recommended that continuing relationships be developed with between the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and the University of Qatar with a small set of knowledgeable external experts.