



Over the last couple months, Mr. Al-Sayed has spent a good portion of his time talking about the QCEA, explaining to educators, the media and the public the results of the test and why it matters. Here, he talks about the response to the test results among different sectors.

## The ABCs Of Assessment

# An Interview with Adel Al-Sayed The Director of the Evaluation Institute Speaks of Reaction to Test Results



**Q. What has reaction to the results been among the different groups with whom you have met?**

Of course there are different kinds of reactions. Some people say this is not a fair test and it is not fair results. Some people say yes these are the facts, this is what the numbers tell us. But what is important for us and what is important I think for the education system is to have this kind of discussion, to raise these questions, to have one measure that everyone respects and says okay let us measure ourselves according to this tool. This is mostly what has happened during and after releasing the results. There has been a lot of discussion, and I can see this as a positive sign.

**Q. Do you feel schools, educators, and students are taking ownership of the results in a way that will prompt them to take the QCEA seriously and work to improve their performance yearly?**

I think this is the first time for the education system to have this kind of test and this kind of results. So I can't say that they really have ownership of the test, but there will be a period of time until they can

grasp the test, the results, the way we present the results, and to have all the pieces that construct this test. I think some schools have started to put into place some improvement plans: what are the aspects of the school we need to improve, how can we improve the results, which subjects of the test do we need to focus on. However, most people ask for more, ask for more specific results related to their school. Some called several times asking about the results for the students even, at the student level.

**Q. While the Evaluation Institute collects testing data on an individual level, it has thus far released only collective numbers, using the figures as indicators of national trends rather than individual performance. Why is that, and have you considered releasing the results on a student-by-student basis?**

We think it could do more harm than good to the students, for several reasons. One of them is that the implementation of the reform just started and the other one is that the curriculum standards which the test is based on were just in implementation for six months (at the time of testing). Some students didn't take the test seriously. We don't want some kids or parents

to receive a report card about their kid and they have either the lowest mark or zero or absent or so on. The main purpose we focus on of the test -- and the whole idea of evaluation actually -- is to improve education and to hold schools accountable. But next year we can release the results at the student level and then we will have a kind of progress of the students at each school.

**Q. Although the Evaluation Institute has held public forums and private meetings on the results, anecdotal evidence indicates that key players, such as teachers, remain in the dark about the QCEA. Are you satisfied with the level of communication with teachers in particular?**

We always need communication. But we depend on the schools for that. We invited all the principals and representatives of the teachers, for science and math and Arabic and English. And we did that for all the schools, almost 300 schools. And we encourage the schools to take the results, to sit with their teachers and try to explain to them. Some schools did and some schools didn't. But again, if schools don't have the initiative to take this responsibility and try to communicate the results, we can't do this to satisfaction.

**Q. In your meetings with educators, some Ministry of Education schools have raised questions about whether the QCEA is fair to them, since they do not give it as much importance as Independent Schools do and the subjects tested are closer to what the IS are teaching. How do you respond?**

In general, the schools of the Ministry of Education were not happy with the results, even though I can have the counter-argument

“There has been a lot of discussion of results, and this is a positive sign.”



saying they just have to look at the results, and understand the results, and then analyze them. There are some points in the results that actually they should be proud of. The Independent Schools were in practice for one year so most of the students who are in these schools were in Ministry of Education schools. And also some of the Ministry of Education schools, at a school level, did better, or almost equal, to Independent Schools. The idea here is that we need to focus on the school, it doesn't matter the label -- Ministry of Education or Independent School or private Arabic schools -- on how all these schools are doing, and how we can improve.

**Q. Are you satisfied with the format and content of the QCEA? Are any major changes planned in the assessment tools in the future?**

At this stage, I can say yes, we are satisfied. However we need more alignment of the test, particularly alignment with the curriculum standards, but as you know the standards set a very high level. We know this test, whatever we do, will be limited because it has some rules and conditions. We are using paper and pencil. We do some kind of listening test but what about speaking, what about other aspects

of the learning process. So there are aspects of learning and education that can not be measured by this test. There are other forms of tests, like portfolios, like projects, and other formats, which we believe we should develop the framework and the schools should implement. So I will be more satisfied having developed the other wing of the comprehensive assessment framework. Also, the test is really a long test. With this length, it is actually to cover as much as we can from the standards. But I think it is long for kids to take. So we would like to reduce the time when we develop the other parts of the assessment framework.

**Q. Qatari students have recently taken a handful of international assessment tests. Are they ready to be compared to their peers globally?**

At least now the students, who are the most important in this process besides of course the teachers, have been through this kind of test, which is a standardized test, for two years. So they are used to this kind of setting. I hope they will take it seriously. If we miss this year, we have to wait either three or four years. It is a good time for us at the beginning of the reform. For the country, it is very important to have some kind of base line, international

base line, so they can compare the progress of the reform to other countries and over time.

**Q. What impact do the assessment results have on education policy and reform?**

We actually discussed this at high levels, at the Supreme Education Council. It was very clear that with all the support for the Independent Schools, which are supposed to be the leading schools in the reform, even though some of these schools did better on this scale, we are not satisfied with the general level and the SEC is not satisfied with the general results. We can see from the results that most of the schools, even the Independent Schools, are in the middle range. In general this is a support for the reform. At least now we can say okay we have a base line and we can measure the progress. But for the Independent Schools a lot, a lot needs to be done. For the rest of the schools, the SEC published the curriculum standards and they are high standards, so the rest of the schools can use these standards to improve the education level. In general I can say, yes, this will support the initiative. But also it will put pressure on schools and authorities.