

The Higher Education Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (HEICAT)

A Tool for Supporting Capacity Strengthening and Performance Improvement in Higher Education Institutions



Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can drive social and economic development by building people’s skills, advancing knowledge, and driving innovation. Despite this potential, HEI’s contributions can be hampered by their complex organizational form, and challenges including misalignment between teaching and labor market need, and weak engagement with industry, government and civil society.

Higher Education Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool

IREX developed the Higher Education Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (HEICAT) to help leaders to maximize the impact of their institutions by assessing institutional capacity to inform strategic planning and performance improvement.

The HEICAT includes over 100 capacity criteria, organized around the institutional pillars and performance objectives below. Through a process of participative data collection, evidence review, analysis and scoring, leaders are guided to assess institutional capacity and develop an evidence-based performance improvement action plan.

Pillar	Objectives
 Foundations for Institutional Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Governance, Management and Leadership • Sufficient Resources
 Quality Teaching and Learner Journeys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Education and Training • Supported and Inclusive Learner Journeys
 Advancing Knowledge and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productive Research Environment • Research Quality and Compliance
 External Engagement for Relevance and Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant Education and Training • Research Impact and Innovation

The full HEICAT Framework, recommended process, implementation tips, and example questions are published under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License at <https://www.irex.org/resource/higher-education-institutional-capacity-assessment-tool-heicat>

HEICAT Features

CONTEXTUALIZED

Designed to align with typical HEI structures and functions, informed by international accreditation frameworks, and tested and adapted with professionals in over 30 HEIs in 17 countries.

MODULAR

Flexibility to tailor to institutional priorities, and available time and resource, offering both expansive review across all functions, or a deeper dive into specific areas.

DATA-INFORMED PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Couples in-depth qualitative data collection with visual data dashboards to identify and prioritize performance improvement efforts and help education leaders make the case for change.

REFLECTIVE SELF-EVALUATION

Promotes organizational learning and ownership of performance goals through collaborative self-assessment.



Engage partners to define objectives and identify capacity assessment dimensions using IREX’s bank of HEICAT practice criterion.



Use HEICAT questions and evidence lists to collect data throughout the organization.



Analyze data, rate capacity using the HEICAT scoring matrix and performance dashboard.



Develop report and performance improvement plan and assign key performance indicators.

HEICAT Implementation Snapshots



UNIVERSITY STRENGTHENING IN IRAQ

IREX coached the University of Mosul, the University of Fallujah, the University of Al-Hamdaniyah and Ninewa University through a self-administered HEICAT assessment to inform rebuilding efforts after the defeat of Daesh. The assessments resulted in a tailored technical assistance package for each university including support to develop a comprehensive research strategy, establishing a faculty development office, and creating an English language center to strengthen workforce development. Insights gained from the HEICAT on administrative and operational attributes supported Iraqi universities in improving the quality and relevance of higher education in Iraq.



INTRODUCTION OF UNIVERSITY-BASED TEACHER PREPARATION IN JORDAN

IREX adapted parts of the HEICAT with the University of Jordan, Yarmouk University, Mu'tah University, and Hashemite University to assess university readiness to implement a new teacher preparation diploma. The assessments informed a tailored package of technical and material support to each university, including provision of equipment and software, faculty and administrator training, and the strengthening of quality assurance systems. These interventions have so far enabled the universities to collectively support student-centered learning for over 2000 students annually, manage practicum placements in over 400 schools, achieve a graduate employment rate of over 70% and progress through the first two stages towards international accreditation with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).



LEARNING TOOL FOR UNIVERSITY RESEARCH MANAGERS

IREX uses the research-oriented sections of the HEICAT to support university leaders to prioritize and pursue performance improvement as an embedded activity within a Research Management and Leadership course. Participants are tasked to collaboratively conduct the assessment to inform an implementation plan to improve research management practice. The course is supplemented by exchange with a U.S. university where the HEICAT serves as a framework for building shared understanding of host and home university practice. As a result of this process, leaders have established a range of administrative enhancements including new e-Research Administration systems, reconfigured organizational units to support sponsored research, and new resources for coaching and mentoring research administrators.

HEICAT Global Implementation



WHAT CAN IREX OFFER TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR PARTNERS?

Are you a university seeking to enhance performance or a Ministry aiming to strengthen the higher education system? Are you a development partner seeking to support these aims? Drawing on our experience supporting organizational performance improvement across a range of sectors and decades of working with universities, IREX offers a range of customized consulting and project support services. IREX can:

- ✓ Support partners to contextualize the tool by identifying assessment objectives and developing tailored criteria, questionnaires, scoring rubrics and dashboards
- ✓ Facilitate or coach partners through the assessment process, including interviews, focus groups, observation and document review, and support analysis and capacity reporting
- ✓ Facilitate the development of a Performance Improvement Action Plan using HEICAT results
- ✓ Facilitate the development of Key Performance Indicators and systems for tracking performance improvement.