Qatar Foundation opens up a world of opportunity for aspiring scientists

Doha, 3 November 2013 – With the support of Qatar Foundation Research and Development, students have attained exemplary results in their postgraduate studies, placing them at the forefront of scientific discovery and enhancing the country's research culture.

Three talented Qatar Science Leadership Program (QSLP) trainees showed commitment to the pursuit of scientific progress by excelling in their postgraduate studies at two prestigious UK universities – Imperial College London and the University of Leicester. These students, Ali Mohammed, Isra Yousef Marei, and Amira Aljabiry, are a testament to the success and value of the QSLP initiative as they contribute to the vision of Qatar's sustainable, knowledge-based economy.

Introduced by Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development in 2008, QSLP has become one of the country's greatest resources for producing a high level scientific cadre to support the country's national research agenda. The programme has already helped many promising researchers to pursue careers in a variety of highly specialised scientific fields, including stem cell research, biomedicine, environmental sustainability and biostatistics.

Dr Ayman Bassil, Head of Research Training and Development at Qatar Foundation's Research Division, stressed the importance of hands-on experience and direct interaction with experts as a critical part of a scientist's education. He highlighted QSLP's determination to expand Qatar's scientific ability to develop home-grown solutions that address the country's pressing research needs, and introduce effective innovations globally.

He said, "This achievement is a validation of the importance that Qatar Science Leadership Program places in supporting the scientific capabilities of our students, in order to advance Qatar's research and development efforts, as well as innovative discoveries. The programme contributes positively to the nation's ongoing mission to grow into a sustainable and leading, knowledge-based economy by ensuring that highly-trained scientists join its workforce."

The unique initiative also helps nationals build rewarding careers with guaranteed placements at Qatar Foundation and its world-class centres. From undergraduate to postdoctoral studies, QSLP offers a full spectrum of opportunities to carve out a meaningful vocation. The programme focuses on the country's core research areas of Health and Biomedicine, Energy and Environment, Computing and Information Technology, Behavioural and Social Sciences, and Humanities.

Ali Mohammed, 25, is currently enrolled in QSLP's Research Scientist Track and recently completed his Master of Science in Biomedical Engineering with distinction from Imperial College London. Being an exceptional researcher, the young Qatari has earned a place in Imperial's doctorate programme and will commence a PhD in Biomedical Engineering and Material Sciences this month.

Ali joined QSLP in August 2012 and has made significant strides ever since. Prior to applying to QSLP, he worked as a process technologist for Qatar Shell in Ras Laffan Industrial City. Although he found his job to be extremely dynamic, he was still eager to pursue his lifelong passion for medicine.

He explains, “By doing my Master of Science in Biomedical Engineering, I could combine medicine and engineering together. QSLP gave me the opportunity to pursue this ambition with strong support and excellent future prospects.”

Ali adds, “QSLP provides its trainees with a unique opportunity to meet lots of young aspiring scientists that together are forming a community of vast and expanding knowledge. QSLP also allows its trainees to network with some of the top scientists from the top institutes across the globe, allowing us to be in the frontline of sciences. I’ve learnt to focus my studies and potential in the direction that will both benefit Qatar, the region and, hopefully, the world. To continue with such studies, it is very important to enjoy the research one does so as to get the best and most beneficial results.”

Although the programme at Imperial College London was very challenging, Ali’s interest in the subject helped keep him focused and drove him to achieve impressive results. In his doctoral studies, he intends to continue his investigation of cartilage regeneration to combat spinal problems and arthritis.

He says, “My research focused on biomaterials for bone regeneration in the field of tissue engineering. The materials we are researching are building the foundation to combat conditions such as osteoporosis and aim to replace bone autografts and allografts as synthetic bone grafts. This research can help provide Qatar with a medical solution to conditions that many of the older generation faces in terms of bone loss, hip replacements, or as mentioned, osteoporosis.”

Ali’s ultimate goal is to teach at university, consult for medical companies affiliated with Qatar and its hospitals, as well as lead research at the Qatar Biomedical Research Institute. He also hopes to encourage other young people to take an interest in science as a means of sustaining the health and security of a nation.

Isra Yousef Marei, 27, is another overachiever in QSLP’s Research Scientist Track. The bright Jordanian has also received a commendable distinction in her degree from Imperial College London, with a Master of Research in Biomedical Research – Respiratory and Cardiovascular Science.

She says, “I heard about QSLP three years ago and was very interested in the Research Scientific Track, which I joined in October 2012. What was really interesting about this programme is that it offered graduate studies in addition to professional training, therefore it offers all that is needed to develop a bright future for any ambitious student.”

Isra decided to focus her research efforts on cardiovascular disease because its prevalence in Qatar and the Middle East has increased, and she believes finding solutions is necessary to minimise the number of deaths. She plans to continue her education with a doctoral degree in the tissue engineering of heart valves at Imperial College London, and has a long-term objective of working with the team at Qatar Cardiovascular Research Center.

“Being a part of QSLP helped me to continue pursuing biomedical science as a course of study and a career. It allowed me to visualise my future, and build a strong plan based on knowledge and experience. In addition, it helped me achieve my goal of pursuing a graduate degree in one of the leading universities and to develop several skills, especially critical and analytical thinking,” says Isra.

“I hope to contribute in the tissue engineering field with the knowledge and expertise I gained through my studies. This field is rapidly advancing and holds the promise of treating a wide spectrum of diseases.”

Amira Aljabiry, 27, says it has always been her dream to become a scientist. The determined Qatari student is well on her way to achieving this lifelong objective having earned a Master of Science in Cancer Chemistry with distinction from the University of Leicester in the UK.

"I joined the Research Scientist Track at QSLP in 2012. Unlike other institutions, QSLP believed in me and offered me the opportunity to continue my postgraduate studies. Studying overseas teaches us many things and the most important lesson I have learned is that science and research are very important to society," says Amira.

"My research area was in cancer studies, particularly in drug discoveries. The degree has helped increase my understanding of cancer and how we can target the disease in order to treat it. Cancer is the third leading cause of death in Qatar and I believe more cancer research is absolutely vital, so for this reason I chose to study this field."

Today, Amira harbours even bigger dreams and is confident and optimistic about the road ahead, knowing full well that Qatar's leadership and the country's institutions will support the younger generation.

"Famous Arab scientists were able, through their research and discoveries, to make history and develop the world. I think, with Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser's encouragement of research and education, Qatar will build an effective knowledge-based economy," she says.

She adds, "I would like to expand more upon the subject I have studied so I can follow in the steps of former Arab scientists who were leaders in their field, and one day become a well-known Qatari female scientist who is able to beat cancer!"

-ENDS-

Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organization that is supporting Qatar on its journey from carbon economy to knowledge economy by unlocking human potential, for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Emir, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser.

QF's work encompasses education, research and community development. World-class universities are brought to Qatar to help create an education sector in which young people can develop the attitudes and skills required for a knowledge economy. At the same time, QF builds Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by developing and commercializing solutions through key sciences. The Foundation also works to foster a progressive society while enhancing cultural life, protecting Qatar's heritage and addressing immediate social needs in the community.

For a complete list of QF's initiatives and projects, visit http://www.qf.org.qa