

## PRESS RELEASE

### **HBKU Research Institutes foster ambition among Qatari high school students at “Bright Sparks”**

Doha, April 19, 2016 – Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI) and Qatar Energy and Environment Research Institute (QEERI), two of HBKU’s prestigious national research institutes, came together to organize a special two-day event for high-school students on April 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> titled “Bright Sparks”. With the support of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the event saw the involvement of over 300 students, the majority of them Qataris, from 72 schools, participating in the Qatar National Astronomy Olympiad (QNAO) and the Qatar Brain Bee Competition (QBCC). The event offered talented secondary students the opportunity to shine both domestically and globally, competing for the chance to represent Qatar in international versions of the competitions.

Students from Mosaab Bin Omair Secondary Independent School for Boys, Ayesha bint Abi Bakr Secondary Independent School for Girls, and Ibn Taymiya Secondary Independent School won the grand awards for creative and innovative projects presented at the QNAO. The results of the brain bee were also announced, with Raya Makarim, from Bright Future International School, taking first place in the competition and winning the opportunity to travel to Copenhagen, Denmark for the International Brain Bee Competition. Makarim, along with Rama Raed Ammuri and Tala Abu Samaan, the second and third place winners, from Al Bayan Secondary Independent School for Girls, also won the unique opportunity to learn more about neuroscience and engage with world-renown researchers at QBRI’s labs.

Started by a team of scientists from QEERI’s Fascination Astronomy Program, a project funded by the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), the Qatar National Astronomy Olympiad was born out of a desire to use astronomy as a gateway to the sciences for students in the country. The program organized visits to 120 schools in Qatar in the fall of 2015 and engaged students in various hands-on astronomy activities.

The outreach efforts led to the creation of 80 Astro Clubs across the country, started by inspired students and teachers. 35 of the clubs participated in the Olympiad with students completing projects around various topics related to astronomy and presenting their work in the presence of a group of judges from QEERI. In addition to the awards distributed, a group of twenty students will soon be selected from among the participants to undergo three more months of intensive training by QEERI specialists, as the institute determines the final team who will represent Qatar at the International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics (IOAA) to be held this December in Bhubanewar, India.

The IOAA is an annual astronomy competition for high school students, designed to expose youth to the branch of science that explores celestial objects, space, and the physical universe as a whole. This year will be the first time an Arab country participates.

Khalid Mohammed AlSheeb from Mosaab Bin Omair Secondary Independent School for Boys, one of the six students on the team that won first place in the grand awards, commented: “Participating in the Olympiad was a great experience. We worked really hard and I’m proud that our effort paid off and am very excited to have won first place.”

Similarly, the Brain Bee Competition is an annual international event directed at students in 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade with over 150 branches around the world. Considered the largest worldwide neuroscience competition, the initiative seeks to test high school students' understanding and knowledge of neuroscience, brain sciences, and the nervous system and to complement one of QBRI's objectives, which is to increase the interest of young students in research and scientific fields. The Qatar Brain Bee competition, the first of its kind in the Middle East, received more than 377 applicants from 37 different schools, to compete over the top three spots and represent Qatar in the International Brain Bee 2016.

Students who participated in the final international round had already successfully advanced through round one and two of the competition. Students were tested on their understanding of the brain and neurosciences through a written exam and questioned by a panel of judges.

Dr. Omar El-Agnaf, Acting Executive Director of QBRI, emphasized: "We are extremely proud of all of the students who took the initiative to participate in Qatar Brain Bee competition 2015 - 2016, as well as the teachers and parents who have supported them through this journey."

"This was the first year we organized the Qatar Brain Bee Competition in hopes of inspiring interest in biology and the sciences broadly among pre-university students. As a global hub for biomedical research, community engagement is a priority for QBRI-HBKU and we hope to continue to do our part in fostering an interest in research in the country."

Raya Makarim from Bright Future International School said: "I really enjoyed participating in the Brain Bee and am very excited about representing Qatar at the international competition. This is a really memorable experience for me. To me, it wasn't about winning, but about learning new concepts that will serve me well in the future."

Dr. Khalid Al-Subai, QEERI's Acting Executive Director, commented: "We are very proud to host the first Astronomy Olympiad in Qatar. Astronomy is one of the best introductions to science in general for the young generation and we are holding the event at a time when Qatar has a deficiency in attracting students to study science, engineering and technology. Being part of an Astronomy Club and preparing for the National and International Astronomy Olympiads can be a very inspiring experience for students."

While QNAO aimed to foster interest in astronomy and astrophysics, and QBBC aimed to enrich, evaluate, and examine high school students' knowledge of brain sciences, both competitions sought to inspire ambition among Qatari high school students.

"Astronomy has proven to be an innovative platform for introducing students in Qatar to science, as it lays down the foundation for knowledge and understanding beyond the boundaries of a classroom. What we have seen here today, at the Qatar National Astronomy Olympiad and Brain Bee Competition is tangible evidence of the success of investing in research and I am sure that we are looking at the next generation of outstanding researchers," commented Dr. Abdul Sattar Al-Taie, Executive Director of QNRF.

Dr. Asmaa Al-Muhannadi, Head of the Scientific Research Team at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education added: "EDU is pleased and honored to collaborate with QBRI and QEERI to organize two

competitions that allow high school students to explore new fields in the sciences and to be trained by experts in astronomy and neurosciences.”

To learn more about the community outreach initiatives of QEERI and QBRI, please visit [www.qeeri.org.qa](http://www.qeeri.org.qa) and [www.qbri.org.qa](http://www.qbri.org.qa).

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### **About Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI)**

Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI) is a national research institute within Hamad bin Khalifa University. As a national research institute, QEERI plays a leading role addressing the national energy and water security grand challenges through research and development (R&D). Aligned with the Qatar National Vision 2030's strategy of transforming the State into a diverse and sustainable knowledge-based economy, QEERI's water R&D program is developing innovative technologies in water desalination and treatment; water quality and reuse; aquifer recharge; and climate change and atmospheric science. QEERI's energy R&D focuses on solar photovoltaics (PV), energy storage and smart grids.

Hamad bin Khalifa University, a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, is an emerging research university located within Education City in Doha, Qatar.

For more information, please visit [www.qeeri.org.qa](http://www.qeeri.org.qa)

### **About Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI)**

Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI) is a national research institute within Hamad bin Khalifa University. As a national research institute, QBRI aims to improve and transform healthcare through innovation in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases affecting the Qatari population and the region. As a disease-focused institute, QBRI concentrates on applying integrative and multidisciplinary approaches to provide novel insights into the molecular basis of grand challenges of breast cancer; type 2 diabetes; and neurological disorders such as autism and epilepsy, and the development of novel biomarkers, diagnostic and therapeutic strategies to facilitate early diagnosis, treatment and management of these devastating diseases towards improving personalized medicine and healthcare.

Hamad bin Khalifa University, a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, is an emerging research university located within Education City in Doha, Qatar.

For more information, please visit [www.qbri.org.qa](http://www.qbri.org.qa)

### **About Hamad bin Khalifa University:**

Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, is an emerging research university that is building its foundation upon unique collaborations with local and international partners. Located in Education City, HBKU delivers undergraduate and graduate programs through its College of Science and Engineering, Law School, College of Public Health, Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, and its College of Humanities and Social Sciences. It also provides unparalleled opportunities for research and scholarship through its research

institutes, and its Center of Executive Education delivers customized programs for the business community of Qatar and the region, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.