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UKH **ALUMNI ASSOCIATION** *NEWSLETTER*



Country Head of Logistics at Talabat

ABDULSAMAD T.ABDULSAMAD



I first joined UKH as an undergraduate student from 2007 to 2011, where I built a strong foundation in business, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Later, I returned for my master's degree from 2015 to 2016, further enhancing my understanding of strategic management and leadership. And now, I'm back again pursuing my PhD. At this point, it seems UKH can't get rid of me or perhaps I can't get rid of UKH. It's been a place of growth, challenges, and new beginnings, and my journey here feels like it's come full circle.

My career started during the first Career Fair at UKH in 2011, where I secured my first job with Newroz Telecom. That moment marked the beginning of my professional journey. From there, I moved to LG Electronics, then to British American Tobacco, and now I'm proud to serve as the Country Head of Logistics at Talabat.

Every step along the way taught me something valuable about resilience, leadership, and the importance of continuous learning. I wish I could say there's a shortcut to success or an easy way to get where you want to go, but the truth is, there's no free lunch.

Life after university can be harsh. The real learning begins when you leave these walls, and it's a different kind of curriculum; one where you discover more about yourself: what you like, what you dislike, and who you truly are, not the polite


version you give when someone asks how you're doing. It's a process that requires effort, humility, and persistence.

To students currently at UKH, I would say this: focus on accounting and finance because good accountants are always in demand. Master G Suite and Microsoft Excel; these tools will be your best friends for the next 20 years. Leverage technology, including generative AI; it may not be popular in universities right now, but in the workplace, it's an incredible tool. Sorry, professors!

Most importantly, enjoy the friendships you build during these years because they'll last a lifetime. You're in for quite a ride, and these relationships will see you through the ups and downs. Whether it's joining an event, trying something new, or laughing with friends, these moments are as important as your studies.

UKH has been a defining part of my journey, not just in my education but in shaping who I am today. Make the most of your time here because what you learn both inside and outside the classroom will be the foundation for everything you build in the years to come.

“Focus on accounting and finance because good accountants are always in demand.”

A professional portrait of Azheen Falah Mustafa, a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a light-colored top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Alumni Stories

International Relations Manager at Kurdistan International Islamic Bank for Investment and Development

AZHEEN FALAH MUSTAFA

My name is Azheen Falah Mustafa, and I am the International Relations Manager at Kurdistan International Islamic Bank for Investment and Development.

My name is Azheen Falah Mustafa, and I am the International Relations Manager at Kurdistan International Islamic Bank for Investment and Development. I graduated from the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) in 2019 with a Bachelor of Science in Business and Management Studies.

My time at UKH was significant, marking my transition into adulthood and preparing me for my professional journey. UKH is forward-thinking, offering high-quality education in a diverse environment where important global issues, such as climate change, digitalisation, and peacebuilding, are actively addressed. One of the key benefits of studying at UKH was the internship opportunities available during the second semester of our junior year. During my time at UKH, I interned with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which allowed me to gain

practical skills and ultimately led to a job offer. This experience helped me explore my career interests early on and inspired me to pursue further education and career opportunities abroad.

Building on the foundation provided by UKH, I earned an MA in International Affairs from the American University of Paris in France. After completing my Master's, I began working with Canal France International as a Project Coordinator, where I gained valuable experience in international development. I later applied for one of the United Nations' Youth Programmes and was selected as one of 20 candidates out of 38,000 applicants. This opportunity led to a position with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a Programme Analyst at their headquarters in New York.

After spending five years studying and working abroad, I decided to return to Kurdistan to use the skills and knowledge I had gained to contribute to my community. I believe that the talent we acquire abroad can be a powerful tool for driving progress and development at home.

My advice to current students is to seize every opportunity to connect, learn, and gain hands-on experience. UKH offers a platform for growth, so build meaningful relationships with your peers and understand the value of the degree you are earning. With commitment and effort, it can take you far.

**Director of Pedagogy and Courses
at the Ministry of Higher Education
and Scientific Research, KRG**

VIAN MAHMUD ZAMDAR

In 2007, I embarked on my master's degree in business and management as part of the inaugural cohort of the postgraduate programme at the University of Kurdistan-Hewlêr (UKH). The programme, which spanned three years, provided a comprehensive curriculum designed to enhance academic proficiency in management. A key requirement of the programme was the successful completion of a thesis, and I focused my research on ethical and unethical conduct within the public sector, with a particular emphasis on the Ministry of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Currently, I serve as the Director of Pedagogy and Courses at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, KRG. The advanced knowledge

and skills I acquired through my studies at UKH have significantly contributed to my professional growth and enabled me to apply innovative and effective management practices in my role. The programme adhered to rigorous international standards, equipping students with cutting-edge scientific methodologies and preparing them to meet global workplace demands.

Studying at UKH profoundly shaped my professional trajectory. Throughout the programme, I honed a range of essential competencies critical for successful management, including leadership, conflict resolution, strategic thinking, problem-solving, and communication. I also developed the ability to work efficiently under pressure and excel in collaborative, team-based environments. These skills have been instrumental in both navigating challenges and driving positive outcomes in my career.

I strongly encourage students to make the most of their time at UKH.

It is an institution that meets high international standards, and the quality of education it provides ensures graduates are well-prepared to succeed in diverse and competitive professional environments.



**Program Manager at Kurdistan
Foundation**

REBAZ JWAMER



When I walked through the gates of the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) in 2010 as a student of Business and Management, I could never have imagined how profoundly it would shape my life. The five years I spent pursuing my undergraduate degree, followed by two years as a master's student from 2015 to 2017, were not merely academic milestones but transformative experiences that laid the foundation for the person I am today.

My journey at UKH was characterised by rigorous learning, exceptional mentorship, and the development of skills that are invaluable in the professional world. From mastering core business principles to enhancing my analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities, UKH's holistic approach to education equipped me with the tools necessary to navigate real-world challenges. Beyond the classroom, the vibrant campus life nurtured resilience, collaboration, and a passion for lifelong learning. These years weren't just about obtaining degrees; they were about becoming adaptable, empathetic, and innovative qualities that have since become the cornerstones of my career.

After graduating, I embarked on a career that has allowed me to make a tangible

impact on society. Today, as a Learning and Development Manager at JOBS. KRD and Volunteer.KRD, I take great pride in supporting young people to find meaningful employment and build their futures. My role involves designing and delivering capacity-building programmes, empowering individuals to unlock their potential and thrive in competitive job markets. This mission resonates deeply with me, as it reflects the values and vision instilled during my time at UKH.

Looking back, I am profoundly grateful to UKH. It wasn't just an institution; it was the launchpad for my aspirations. UKH gave me the confidence to dream big and the competence to turn those dreams into reality. I will forever cherish the learning, friendships, and memories created within those walls.

I often say that UKH isn't just a place of study; it's a place where dreams take flight. For that, I will always be thankful.

Founder and Director of Access Aid Foundation (AAF)

AHMAD QARADAGHI

After completing my A-Levels, I chose a new path by enrolling at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) to study Politics and International Relations, despite my background in the sciences at school. This shift was both challenging and exciting. Moving to Erbil for my studies and living in a dormitory was an adventure that allowed me to form lasting friendships and experience personal growth through various events and workshops.



UKH was not just an educational institution; it nurtured vital life skills such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving, which prepared me for challenges beyond academia. The university environment, where learning came from both professors and peers, played a crucial role in shaping who I am today. I am deeply grateful for the lessons and opportunities that helped me leverage my strengths and develop new ones.

Before graduating, I recognised that my language skills were a strength, so I began working as a translator for international media in 2014. This quickly led to a role as a producer, but after achieving success in media, I felt the need for change. I wanted to pursue something more aligned with my passion, which led me to the humanitarian sector. I briefly worked as the spokesperson for Oxfam Iraq but eventually founded the Access Aid Foundation (AAF) in Erbil.

The first 14 months of running AAF were challenging, as I started the organisation from scratch. However, perseverance paid off, and today, AAF employs over 500 people across multiple countries. We have supported over 200,000 people in Iraq with medical supplies, shelter, psychological support, and more. AAF has helped rebuild communities affected by conflict and provided critical aid to hospitals across the country.

In 2020, AAF expanded internationally, launching its first mission in Yemen. Our food programmes there have been vital in addressing malnutrition, benefiting thousands of people. Today, AAF operates in Iraq, Yemen, and Ukraine.

Looking back, my journey from UKH to global humanitarian work was shaped by the skills and experiences I gained at university. UKH not only provided academic knowledge but also helped me discover my strengths and purpose. One valuable lesson was to always challenge my comfort zone and seize opportunities to make a difference.

As a UKH graduate, I encourage current students to embrace all the opportunities university offers. It's a time for self-discovery, personal growth, and developing the skills you need for the future. Make the most of academic workshops, internships, and networking events to shape the path you want to take after graduation.

Portfolio Fulfillment Manager at GE Vernova

GULAN AWAT ALI

Joining the University of Kurdistan Hewler (UKH) was a bold choice, filled with both uncertainty and potential. At the time, there were rumours about the University's possible closure, and UKH had a strict policy that could result in dismissal for students who failed a course. Despite these challenges, it was the only institution that aligned with my ambitions. After a rigorous application process involving multiple exams and interviews, I persuaded my parents to allow me to pursue my studies there.

Reflecting on my five years at UKH, where I completed my BSc in the Natural Resources Department, majoring in Petroleum Engineering, I realise that my education went far beyond academic coursework. UKH provided me with invaluable skills, lifelong friendships, and lasting memories.

One of my most memorable experiences was in 2013, when I had the opportunity to undertake an internship with Hunt Oil. I spent a month on-site at an oil field, applying the theoretical knowledge from my studies in a real-world setting. This experience was invaluable in shaping my practical understanding of the industry.

UKH also helped launch my career. I secured my first job with General Electric (GE) through a university job posting, starting as part of the Graduate Management Programme. Later, I completed the Contractual Services Leadership Programme (CSLP) and became the second certified Contract Performance Manager in GE Iraq. My time at UKH had equipped me with the skills and confidence to take on new challenges, which led me to join Chevron as a Contract Advisor. Subsequently, my husband, Roja Dashty, and I were offered the opportunity to move to Norway, and I joined DNO at its headquarters in Oslo.

Today, I work remotely as a Portfolio Fulfillment Manager at GE Vernova, overseeing projects in Iraq, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait. It is both exciting and challenging to manage multi-million-dollar contracts across different countries. I am proud of the extensive experience I have gained working in male-dominated industries like Oil & Gas and Power. My expertise lies in the Procure-to-Pay (P2P) process and end-to-end contract management, from inception to completion.

I credit UKH for much of my professional success. It equipped me with the skills, confidence, and resilience to exceed my goals and thrive in challenging roles across diverse environments.

Outside work, I enjoy spending time with my family and close friends. I own a small business, and I particularly enjoy travelling and exploring the world with Roja and our adorable two-year-old son, Jan.



A UKH ALUMNUS RECEIVES THE PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF FOREIGN PRESS CORRESPONDENT - US

Diyar Kurda, an alumnus of the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH), has received the prestigious Professional Excellence Award from the Association of Foreign Press Correspondents (AFPC-US). This recognition was granted to him on 4th December 2024.

Kurda is being honored for his outstanding contributions in covering high-profile governmental bodies in the United States, including the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon. These institutions are central to U.S. politics, foreign relations, and defense, making the role of journalists covering them both crucial and challenging.

“You who have covered Iraq and Middle East, you know being journalists and covering there, it’s not an easy job

because there is a lot of pressure on you. You must be so brave. You have to risk your life, and sometimes you lose your beloved ones, just to be a journalist,” Kurda said.

Being awarded the Professional Excellence Award highlights Kurda’s significant impact in foreign journalism, especially in providing accurate, insightful, and professional reporting on U.S. political affairs from a foreign perspective. The award recognizes not just technical journalistic skill, but also the commitment to upholding journalistic ethics and standards in an environment where media plays a vital role in shaping public understanding of global events.

This achievement is also a proud moment for his alma mater, UKH, as it showcases the caliber of its graduates, who are excelling on the international stage.



Grants Management Officer at Mercy Corps

RANYA HAMAWANDY

My name is Ranya Hamawandy, and my journey with the University of Kurdistan-Hewlêr began when I enrolled in the Political Science programme. Graduating in 2016, my time at UKH was transformative, equipping me with invaluable skills such as academic writing, public speaking, critical thinking, and leadership. These skills became the cornerstone of my personal and professional growth.

During my undergraduate years, I had the privilege of serving as Head of the Entertainment Department in 2012, where I organised various events that brought the university community together. I was later elected President of the Political Science Department in 2016, a role that further sharpened my leadership and organisational abilities. These experiences not only enriched my time at UKH but also prepared me to navigate the complexities of the professional world.

After completing my bachelor's degree, I pursued a Master's in International Relations at Girne American University in Cyprus, graduating in 2019. However, my career journey began earlier, in 2013, when I started working as an Independent Charity Campaigner in Erbil. Over five years, I provided aid and support in numerous refugee camps across the region. This work ignited my passion for humanitarian efforts and advocacy, which I shared as a speaker at



TEDxUKH in 2014, shedding light on the challenges faced by refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

My professional path has taken me through diverse roles with reputable NGOs, including International Medical Corps, Hungarian Interchurch Aid, and now Mercy Corps. In these roles, I have focused on project management and development programmes, contributing to initiatives that empower communities and foster sustainable growth.

To the current students of UKH, my advice is simple but vital: believe in yourself. Life will present challenges, and there will be moments when others may try to undermine your strength, but stay resilient and focused. Invest in yourself continuously, whether through education, skills development, or self-discovery. UKH provides you with the foundation; it is up to you to build on it with determination and perseverance.

Looking back, I am proud to call myself a UKH alumna. The university gave me not only an education but also a platform to explore my potential, paving the way for a career that aligns with my passion for making a difference in the world.

Mathematics Coordinator/Head of Math Department at SABIS
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL-MELTHO

GORAN KHALID

My journey in education and leadership has been shaped by hard work, passion, and a dedication to doing my best. I graduated from the University of Kurdistan-Hewlêr in 2017 with a degree in Petroleum Engineering. Although my degree was in engineering, I discovered a natural talent and passion for teaching mathematics, a subject I had always enjoyed and excelled in.

After graduating, I began my career as a mathematics teacher at Cambridge International School in Hewlêr. Over the next six years, I honed my teaching skills, created engaging lesson plans, and built a supportive and inspiring learning

environment for my students. During this time, I earned the respect of my colleagues, students, and their parents, consistently achieving excellent results in the classroom.

Wanting to take on more responsibility and contribute to educational leadership, I applied for the position of Mathematics Coordinator and Head of Mathematics at SABIS International School. My experience, dedication, and leadership skills helped me secure this important role. Now, I lead a team of teachers, ensuring we deliver high-quality mathematics education while fostering a cooperative and positive departmental culture.



From my start as an engineering graduate to becoming an educational leader, this journey has enriched my career and strengthened my belief in the power of education to change lives. I am grateful for the foundation UKH provided me with and am committed to making a positive difference in education.



Alumni Stories

Accountant at Skip

SAMAN BAZENE

Looking back, my time at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) was undoubtedly a defining chapter that set the stage for my personal and professional growth, one that I appreciate more deeply as time passes. The more I reflect on my time there, the more grateful I become for the opportunities UKH provided. The culture, environment, expectations, and challenges were all integral to where I am today. UKH is more than just an educational institution; it is a place that shapes its students into resilient, capable individuals. While my journey wasn't always easy, the challenges I faced helped me grow both professionally and personally, equipping me with the skills necessary for success.

When I graduated from UKH, I was working in the private sector, but shortly after, I transitioned into the humanitarian field. I had the privilege of working with esteemed international NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and Première Urgence Internationale. UKH graduates were often given priority in these international organisations because we were recognised for making a real difference wherever we went. We were frequently praised for being critical thinkers who consistently played key roles in advancing the vision and mission of the organisations.

Subsequently, I relocated to Canada and began working for Skip, the largest and most recognised Canadian online food delivery app in the country, a division of Just Eat Takeaway. I can confidently say that the skills and personal growth I gained at UKH were essential during my transition to a new country and my integration into the Canadian workforce. Despite coming from a different educational and cultural background, I never felt at a disadvantage. The reason for my success is clear: UKH's educational standards are international, preparing its graduates to excel in any work environment around the world.

To the current students at UKH, I encourage you to recognise the immense value of the opportunity you have. Enjoy your time, seize every moment, and make the most of every challenge. Remember, each difficulty you face is a steppingstone to learning and growth. Many alumni before you have gone on to make an impact both locally and internationally, and now it's your turn to carry that legacy forward and uphold UKH's high standards.