

New tech deal connects five local universities

BEIRUT: Five local universities signed a technology cooperation agreement that connects researchers and students locally and internationally, allowing them to collaborate on projects and share knowledge, a statement from the American University of Beirut announced Wednesday.

The Technology Cooperation Agreement for Research and Education, or TechCARE, was signed Monday on AUB's campus and got the signature of five established higher education institutions in Lebanon – AUB, Saint Joseph University, the Lebanese American University, the Beirut Arab University and the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik.

The event ratified Lebanon's National Research and Education Network, a concept that has been in the works sporadically since 2011.

“The idea is to work together with

the different universities ... to establish collaboration services,” chief information officer at AUB Yousif Asfour said, noting collaboration could be as simple as sharing data.

“We're also trying to establish a network, so we can have collaborations within faculties, staff and other researchers,” he added.

Eduroam, a service that allows students to access the network of other universities using their own university credentials, is already being offered between universities involved in education networks within the agreement.

“For example, I'm an AUB member and I visit USJ. I can use their network using my AUB username and password,” Asfour said, adding that this also applies to global universities within the network.

“When I'm in the [United] States

and I go to the New York University, I can access their network, and vice versa when people come to AUB.

“This is one of the first things we've done with the 10 universities that were involved in setting up the network,” Asfour said.

‘What we're trying to establish is a Lebanese NREN’

In the earlier phases, the network was known as LebREN and involved several universities outside of the current agreement, including the Lebanese University and the University of Balamand. However, Asfour said the universities were still a part of discussions, adding, “It's only a matter of time until they join.”

Asfour said the network could eventually share databases if the universities involved agree, noting there were potential privacy and security concerns restricting the move.

Some of the possibilities NREN opens up for universities include video conferences across campuses and collaborating on developmental projects with other universities.

TechCARE will also connect to European research network GEANT and its EUMedConnect3 program, in addition to the regional Arab network ASREN.

“What we're trying to establish is a Lebanese NREN ... that puts a framework in place to allow Lebanese institutions to collaborate.

“But also, connect Lebanon and have Lebanon's NREN work with the NRENs in the world,” Asfour said of the international agreements. – G.T.