

The Plant Accelerator®

Knowledge Transfer –

Improving the student experience in Iraq

A prestigious scholarship from the Iraqi Government enabled Nawar Shamaya to undertake his PhD in Australia and the young researcher has big plans for making a difference to the student experience when he returns home to Baghdad later this year.

In a war torn country, Nawar's Master degree researching the salinity tolerance of cotton took longer than expected to complete; but the student saw his luck change when he was awarded a highly sought-after Government scholarship to further his education in another country.

"The Iraqi Government provides funding to send their brightest students abroad to gain important skills and research experience that can be shared on their return to Iraq. Australia is certainly on the list of desirable countries when it comes to research and education," says Nawar.

Nawar joined the Australia Centre for Plant Functional Genomics at the University of Adelaide's Waite Campus in September 2008.

"The first few months were quite challenging," says the young Iraqi. "I had to learn English, even cooking and adapt to a new culture. I think, I've come a long way since," he smiles.

Nawar's PhD study involves the investigation of osmotic tolerance in wheat. Apart from learning new research skills and techniques using modern laboratories and greenhouses, Nawar was able to undertake two experiments using the high-throughput phenomics platform at The Plant Accelerator®, Australian Plant Phenomics Facility.

"The facility allows us to phenotype plants for our traits of interest in a fast, non-destructive and precise way. Phenomics is in its early stages of development and there is great potential to further develop new



tools in this field, which is very exciting," comments Nawar.

Apart from broadening his research skills, Nawar will return to Iraq with new and improved communication and interpersonal skills and he has big plans for sharing these with his colleagues at Baghdad University.

"Teaching students should not simply be about providing an answer to a question. I learned in Australia that it is important to equip students with the tools and confidence to become critical thinkers who are able to research and find the answers themselves. When I return home, I will encourage all research groups at my university to learn and speak English to enable us to interact and collaborate at the international level," says Nawar.

The Iraqi Prime Minister's Advisor for the Agricultural Sector recently visited the University of Adelaide and Nawar was able to meet and share his experience with him. Nawar has been invited to meet with the Minister's Advisor when he returns to Baghdad to share his thoughts on how to improve research infrastructure and research training in his country; an opportunity he is looking forward to embrace.