

SEMF OPEN EVENING AT PORTER'S ON THURSDAY 25TH JUNE 2009

The Forum held its Summer Open Evening at Porter's, the Mayor's residence in Southchurch Road, Southend. The guest speaker was Mr Ali Hadawi, the Principal of Southend Adult Community College.



His presentation focused on his role as a member of the 'Rawabit' group, a consortium of senior educationalists in the United Kingdom whose aim is to promote and support the educational development and capacity of the people of Iraq.

Ali was born in Babylon, Iraq, although he has spent most of his adult life studying and working in the UK. He is the only Arab principal in this country and is passionate about issues such as strategic vocational education and the training needs of employees in local government and the private and voluntary sectors. His vast experience in the field of further education has led to invitations to sit on many government sponsored groups in an advisory capacity, especially with regard to the themes of social cohesion and the prevention of violent extremism,

Ali first gave us a short history of Iraq from pre-biblical times through to the present day, including the fact that there was a strong connexion between the UK and Iraq during the early years of the twentieth century. He also gave details of the economic infrastructure of the country and the historical reliance on oil as the main provider of wealth. However, with the recent turbulent history, industrial production has been severely affected and the unemployment rate is currently very high. The Rawabit group is trying to address this by linking with individual colleges of excellence throughout Iraq, twinning with them with British institutions which can provide support and expertise. The aim is not to impose British models of working, but to help develop models that are appropriate to and will work in Iraq.

Ali still visits the country of his birth from time to time in connexion with his role in Rawabit (he is the Vice Chairman) and, following his presentation, was happy to answer questions from the floor. These were mainly concerned with the 'status quo' there now and the prospects of successfully creating a democratic country escaping from the effects of a savage war. Ali expressed his hope in what was being both achieved and planned to restore the country to prosperity and provide a safe and happy environment for its population.

Ahmad Khwaja, the SEMF Chair, expressed his thanks to Ali for a very interesting presentation and then invited the thirty or so members present to partake of the cold buffet which had been prepared and transported to Porters by the caterers at SAVS. Members were also given a financial update by the Treasurer and informed of further events that were planned for the autumn session. They were also invited to renew their membership subscriptions for 2009-10. The meeting closed at 10pm and thanks were given to the Porters staff for their hospitality and the caterers for a delicious buffet.

Sandra Wilkes