

Roadmap to Become a World-Class University

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1 Introduction

Raising the educational and academic status and ranking of universities to that of internationally accepted world-class universities has become the goal of many university higher administrators around the globe in recent years. This trend has been made possible and accelerated by rapid global economic growth and development. Such efforts inevitably involve the progressive evolution of successful strategies dealing with issues concerning academic and educational excellence, funding, support facilities' suitability, academic staff qualifications, and graduates' competencies. Within this global academic context, an initiative for attaining world-class university rank and status was undertaken by King Abdulaziz University (KAU). The aim of this initiative was not primarily to compete with leading internationally recognized universities, but was rather a means of showcasing the academic and educational strengths and potential of KAU, and of creating an appropriate and navigable roadmap to facilitate genuine, academically credible, and enduring improvements in the quality of the higher education provided.

Before discussing KAU's approach to this venture, it is necessary to differentiate between the two concepts "university internationalization" and "world-class university" which are sometimes used interchangeably, although their meanings are dissimilar. KAU has selected to seek the status and ranking of "world-class university".

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2 Internationalization in Higher Education

The term “internationalization” covers a broad range of concepts of varying scope and emphasis concerning various aspects of higher education. A number of viewpoints have been adopted concerning university internationalization, and consequently differences in understanding of the term have become apparent. Internationalization can involve international contributions on syllabi, literature in other languages, exchange of professors and students, international studies, international technical collaboration, and academic staff mobility.

Internationalization in terms of activities includes academic and non-academic activities such as the development of curricula, scholar and student exchange, technological assistance, intercultural teaching, and joint research activities. The level of concentration of activities varies, depending on the specific educational and academic situation and geographical location of the concerned universities.

The European Association for International Education (EAIE) defines internationalization as the entire range of procedures by which higher education becomes less national, and more internationally oriented [1]. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) (now it is called Universities Canada) defines internationalization as a multitude of activities aimed at providing an educational practice within an environment that integrates a global perspective [2].

Others define internationalization as the integration of international aspects into teaching, research, and community services. This involves the integration of an international/intercultural/global perspective into a university’s major functions whereby the university’s higher education system develops an international orientation [3].

Internationalization can also refer to interactions between cultures through teaching, research, and community service functions, with the aim of attaining understanding, communication, and discussion across cultural and geographical borders.

This explains why internationalization is frequently referred to in relation to cultural integration and conflicts in some countries. In Asia, for example, cultural and ideological implications have been incorporated in the internationalization concept resulting in meanings such as “Westernization,” and “Liberalization”. This is the reason some scholars pose the question: how can a university rooted in its values open itself to thoughts and ethics derived from other knowledge sources [4]?

Internationalization is also sometimes described in terms of the process of learning the languages, social systems, and broader cultures of other countries.

As a result of the above, it is clear that any given understanding of internationalization depends on the particular socio-cultural context.

3 World-Class University

World-class universities, usually referred to as the most prominent research universities, are essential in developing competitiveness in the international knowledge economy. These universities play key roles in generating and circulating

knowledge, educating highly skilled personnel for leadership, and serving the needs of society. In recent years, the development of world-class universities has featured prominently in the strategic planning of a range of countries. Various developmental strategies at national and institutional levels have been drawn up and implemented. In this context, Shanghai Jiao Tong University has initiated the International Conference on World-Class Universities, to bring together university administrators and top researchers from around the globe to discuss issues related to world-class universities, in the context of an increasing number of countries and higher educational institutions facing up to the challenge of the achievement of academic excellence. Universities in developing countries are making every effort to improve their ability to boost their research performance to achieve and maintain their worldwide positions and status [5–10].

There are important questions that must be answered:

- How does a university develop its status to become a world-class university?
- Are all universities facing identical issues and challenges?
- Can one university's successful strategies be transferred to other universities in other countries?

World-class universities are sometimes referred to as global research universities. World-class universities are academic institutions dedicated to creating and spreading knowledge in a range of disciplines and fields, delivering quality higher education at all levels, serving national needs, and furthering international public interest. Scholars and institutional administrators define “world-class” as attaining the standard to be included in the Lists of World University Rankings, which focuses on quality of education, internationalization, research output, status, and impact. Key attributes of world-class universities include qualified faculty, academically gifted and successful students, excellence in research, quality teaching at an international standard, high levels of funding, and well-equipped facilities. A world-class university is able to attract the most academically able students and the most highly qualified professors and researchers. It should also have access to plentiful funding sources and offer a rich learning and research environment, so as to respond flexibly and appropriately to the demands of a changing international market.

4 Important Considerations Related to World-Class University Status

For a university to become world-class, it has to ceaselessly strive for excellence. This has obvious implications for the quality of higher education. The distinction of a university and its academic preeminence is dependent on the maintenance of enduring and prolonged high levels of academic and educational excellence and accomplishment.

Expectations of quality differ from one viewpoint to another depending on factors such as educational situation, processes, input and output, vision and mission, university objectives, teaching and research outcomes, graduates' employment status, and student involvement.

There are other dimensions to definitions of quality such as excellence, consistency with set standards, appropriateness, and stakeholders' satisfaction.

Quality in higher education is not straightforward to define, but the substantial increase in international competition and variation in the higher educational sector, which has created a rich diversity of courses, programs, and degrees, has resulted in an increasingly necessary requirement for quality evaluation and assurance. In fact, quality assurance is a phrase with a wide range of interpretations encompassing a continuous process of assessing, observing, securing, maintaining, and improving the quality of higher educational institutions. Improvement in practice is a result of the persistence of quality assurance. Thus, it is inseparably related to standards in education, which are used to measure outcomes to be used for comparison against indicators. Quality assurance can be assessed by inspection and accreditation. High quality is indicative of high status and high ranking which is a recognized measure of world-class excellence [11–15].

With regard to ranking, there are three global university rankings employing different methodologies. These are the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), which is conducted by Shanghai Jiao Tong University [16], the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings [17], and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings [18]. Many organizations and companies believe that the quality of a university is measured by its position in the ranking tables. Uppermost universities in the ranking lists are recognized as being of uppermost quality. This is the reason for ranking being regarded as a means to draw higher educational institutions into the global knowledge market, despite the fact that more weight is put on research output rather than the quality of teaching by most of the rankings. This is due to the fact that research performance can be easily ascertained from international data sources without subjective measures having to be undertaken.

Since educational quality encompasses all three primary functions of higher educational institutions: teaching, research, and community service, KAU has strived for excellence in all three functions. In addition to seeking to be placed in the ranking tables, KAU has also made great efforts to obtain accreditations for all of its academic programs. This is an important stage on the pathway we have elected to follow for the establishment of a world-class university.

5 Strategies to Achieve World-Class Status

World-class university status entails certain essential defining characteristics to be in place. These are a high concentration of talent, plentiful resources, and policies designed to encourage the pursuit of academic and educational excellence.

KAU is a state university and receives abundant budgetary resources and favorable care from the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. The higher administration of KAU has worked with dedication to utilize its available budget to acquire the academic talents commensurate with its bid for excellence. Unlike other excellence programs of universities, such as the German Excellence Initiative, which mainly focuses on excellence in research, KAU has sought to improve quality of all aspects of its higher education encompassing teaching and research. World-class universities play a critical role within the higher educational system in training the professionals, scientists, and researchers required for economic development and for the generation of new knowledge in support of national growth and innovative progress.

KAU's success to date in this regard has been achieved due to unstinting and generous support from the government of the Kingdom, and in particular from the Ministry of Education, which has an ambitious strategic plan for the future of the country's higher educational sector. This support is crucial for a world-class institution. Additionally, KAU has abundant resources which are necessary to maintain a thriving university. Furthermore, KAU has a concentration of talent, a dynamic leadership team, appropriate financial resources and incentives, and a modern and suitable technological infrastructure. The successful combination of these elements has been of critical importance in the creation of the academic and educational environment that has proved so conducive to KAU's progress.

6 Infrastructure

The foundation for the venture toward international recognition and world-class academic status was the establishment of a campus with an excellent and appropriate infrastructure. Great care was attached to the design and construction of facilities to provide the required infrastructural environment to facilitate creation of academic and educational excellence. This is certainly crucial for both students and researchers. Adequate state-of-the-art laboratories are essential for the production of scientific work of a high academic caliber. Although all existing KAU faculties are of a high standard, new buildings are currently under construction for many faculties in order to modernize the infrastructure. Some faculties have already moved to their new locations, which are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, while other faculties are preparing to do so.

Since innovative pedagogy requires appropriate facilities, KAU is ensuring the provision of facilities for active learning, problem- and project-based learning, and teamwork and peer learning, in addition to conventional lecture halls and classrooms. Computer laboratories and facilities are being made available throughout the university.

7 Accreditations

KAU outlined its academically and educationally ambitious forward-looking vision and mission for the future with an established set of objectives based on encompassing, underlying, and deep-seated traditions. KAU has striven to ensure that its academic operations, including curriculum design and development, are tailored to achieve a substantial completion percentage of its strategic plans. The university recognizes that well-designed curricula (in line with the vision, mission, and objectives), along with highly qualified academics, constitute the cornerstone of higher education [19].

Although KAU curricula are of internationally recognized educational and academic standards, they are not imported from foreign universities. KAU undertakes the lengthy process of designing and reviewing its own curricula because it is recognized that this process contributes toward the goal of creating the academic culture required for the achievement of standards of educational and academic excellence. This process assists curriculum designers to also focus on catering for the competencies and skills requirements of the local employment market and that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In order to ensure the establishment of an academically and educationally rigorous culture, KAU has ambitiously been expanding quantitative targets. Some fifty years ago, KAU began with a small number of programs and students, whereas currently it has more than 200 undergraduate programs, and approximately 190 graduate programs, all enhanced and supported with high-quality teaching and research. This has been accomplished over time with stable leadership, continuous development, and persistence in the pursuit of academic and educational excellence, that has led to the creation of the vigorous scientific traditions required for the production of cutting-edge research and for the judicious and effective application of educational technology.

The university has witnessed significant development on many fronts and has succeeded in achieving successful academic accreditations for the majority of its academic programs from internationally recognized academic accreditation bodies. This development is a result of carefully staged planning and process management. The first KAU Faculty to obtain accreditation was the Faculty of Engineering. The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) has to date accredited the 12 Engineering programs on two occasions, 2002 and 2008. Currently the Faculty of Engineering is preparing for its third re-accreditation.

The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) has been established by the Higher Council of Education as an independent authority with responsibility for accreditation and quality assurance in post-secondary education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its mission is to encourage, support, and evaluate the quality of post-secondary institutions and the programs they offer to ensure that the quality of student learning outcomes, the management and support services provided within institutions, and the

contributions to research and the communities served by post-secondary institutions are consistent with, and equal to, internationally accepted higher educational standards.

The Commission is recognized within Saudi Arabia and internationally for the quality and effectiveness of its contributions to continuing improvement in the quality of post-secondary education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Currently all KAU programs are required to achieve successful NCAAA accreditation prior to seeking accreditation from international bodies.

8 Admitting Academically Gifted and Able Students

KAU planned to create its own human resource pool from the early stages of its development. All admitted graduates and undergraduates are selected from academically elite student applicants. One admission condition is that successful applicants have high scores in the examinations of the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education. These Saudi National Matriculation Tests are required by most Saudi universities for the admission of new students. However, the universities' admission requirements differ in terms of score levels required.

KAU has adopted the Preparatory Year scheme in which all students study compulsory courses to prepare them for university academic life and their selected major study fields. There are two streams in this year, one for science students and one for arts and humanities students. Students who demonstrate a lack of required levels of academic ability during this year usually leave the university or transfer to Community Colleges that provide short-cycle degrees (Diplomas and Professional Certificates), or to Vocational Technical Education Colleges.

9 Scholarships Program for Academically High Performing Graduates

In the initial phase of its development, KAU hired primarily foreign academics, which was necessary at that time to assist in the acceleration of its launch by utilizing the expertise of experienced teachers and researchers. The foreign academics at KAU at that time were also instrumental in the training of young national academics. Currently, in excess of 60 % of KAU academics are Saudi nationals.

KAU selects the highest achievers academically from its graduates in all disciplines to offer them scholarships to pursue graduate studies abroad for Master's and Doctoral degrees in top ranked world-class universities to prepare them to return to KAU and become KAU academic staff members. By so doing KAU guarantees future highly qualified academic staff members and acquires in-depth awareness of their academic profiles.

Almost 50 % of the scholarships are to USA top ranked universities, while approximately 25 % are to UK top ranked universities. The remaining scholarships are to Canada, Australia, and Europe. This is shown in Fig. 1.

The number of scholarships has increased annually as shown in Fig. 2. Scholarships are for both male and female graduates (in an approximately 50-50 ratio).

There are some female students who are not able to travel abroad for full time study due to family circumstances. To ensure that these students are enabled to attain their full academic potential, KAU has signed agreements with a number of top ranked British universities to allow them to study at home under a joint supervision program. Each student is assigned a supervisor at the British university and a supervisor at KAU. There are regular supervisor exchanges and meetings including the involved students to solve any issues and problems, while continuous email

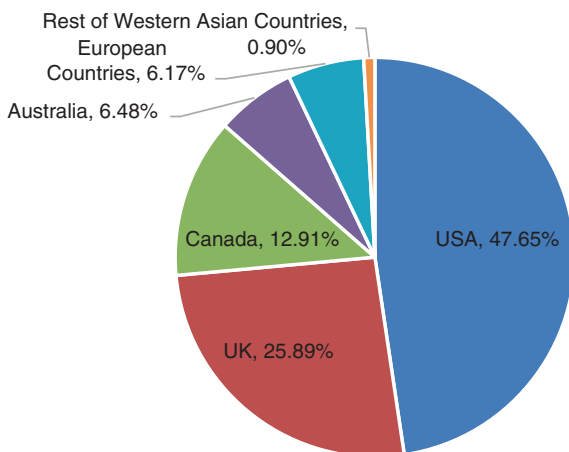


Fig. 1 Percentage of scholarships to top ranked universities

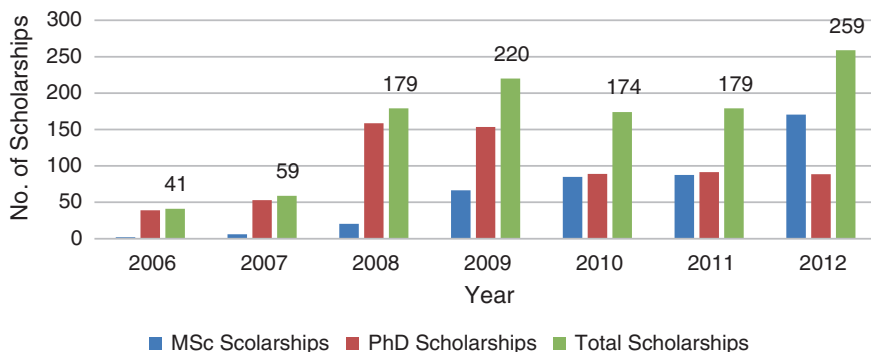


Fig. 2 Number of scholarships between 2006 and 2012

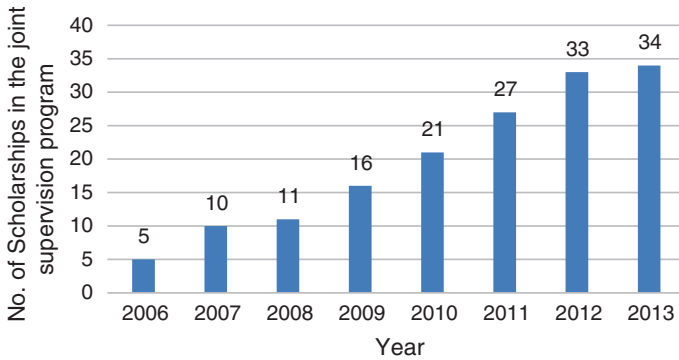


Fig. 3 Number of scholarships in the joint supervision program

contact is maintained throughout the year. Figure 3 shows the number of female students in this joint supervision program.

10 Graduate Studies Programs

Graduate students are in the front line of scientific research. This is the reason KAU started its graduate programs so soon after its foundation. Currently, KAU has 190 graduate programs in all of its specializations, 22 % of which are PhD programs, while the remainder are Master’s programs. The total number of students in these programs is 7260 graduate students (male and female), including foreign students. The international graduate students program started five years ago and is successfully attracting students from different countries. KAU grants scholarships to top international students to pursue their studies in various university graduate programs.

For graduate courses, the total number of new entrants has significantly increased, and this growth has necessitated strengthening and invigorating all aspects of higher educational academic research at the university. This has helped to ensure that when KAU graduates enter the employment market their competencies and qualifications are sought after and welcomed by local and national employers.

KAU has become the recognized national venue for “elite higher education”. It has a reputation for academic excellence and is considered to represent quality higher education in keeping with the requirements of the nation and society’s rapid economic development. These factors enable KAU to have the privilege of receiving high levels of funding and to recruit the most academically talented students.

Figure 4 shows the increase in numbers of those who were awarded Master’s or PhD degrees on completion of KAU graduate programs.

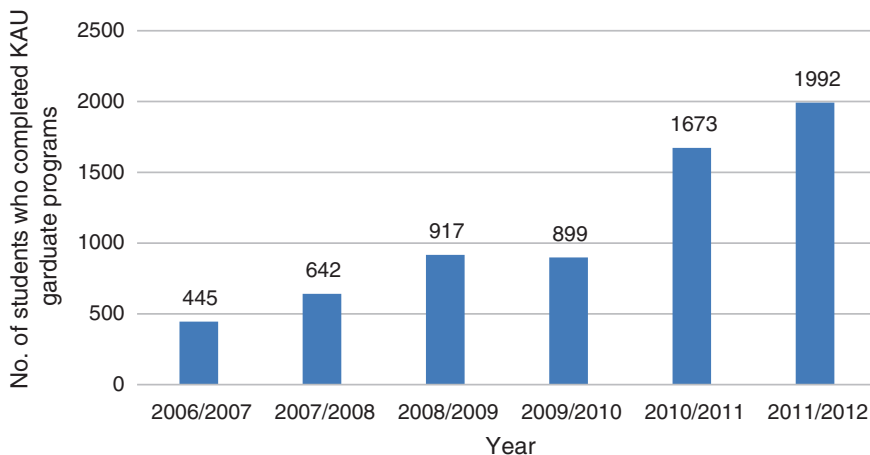


Fig. 4 Numbers of those who were awarded Master's or PhD degrees

11 KAU Research Prizes

KAU has always encouraged its academic staff by all possible means. One such means of encouragement are research prizes. The latest list of research prizes includes:

- Prize for publishing papers in “Nature” and “Science”;
- Prize for publishing in ISI ranked journals;
- Prize for publishing in ranked human sciences journals;
- Best Researcher Prize;
- Best Student Researcher Prize;
- Distinguished Scientist Prize;
- Citation Prize;
- Prize for Winners of International Prizes;
- Best College in Research Prize;
- Patent Prize;
- Translation Prize.

The amounts awarded vary, but can be as much as SR 150,000 (US\$ 40,000) for publishing in “Nature” and “Science”. In excess of 800 prizes are awarded annually.

12 Encouraging Conference Attendance by Academic Staff

Conferences are venues for the exchange of knowledge and experience. KAU encourage its academic staff to attend international conferences to enable them to meet with prominent scientists and witness presentations of the results of the

latest research. Several hundred academic staff members are sponsored annually to participate in international conferences, to present academic research papers, and to network with international scholars. In many cases, ongoing and mutually beneficial collaboration between KAU scientists and others emerge from these events. KAU’s encouragement of its academic staff’s participation in such events has resulted in the name of KAU being widely recognized and acknowledged by the international scientific community. This recognition and acknowledgement has resulted in many members of this community showing willingness to cooperate and work on joint research projects with KAU.

13 Scientific Research Funding

One important factor that affects the dissemination of the culture of scientific research among academic staff is the availability of funds enabling academic concepts and ideas to be explored, investigated, and realized through conducting research. A prime factor in ensuring funding is that would-be researchers are required to provide substantive evidence that proposed work is eligible for publishing in ranked ISI journals or their academic status equivalents.

Several hundred research projects are funded every year under different schemes. In addition, KAU acts as a mediator between its scholars and other organizations which provide funds for scientific research, such as King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy, and SABIC Company. These bodies support approximately one hundred KAU research projects annually. This policy, in conjunction with the prize policy, has resulted in a dramatic increase in the volume of publications and citations of KAU in ranked ISI journals. Figure 5 shows the increase in KAU publications and citations for the last fifteen years.

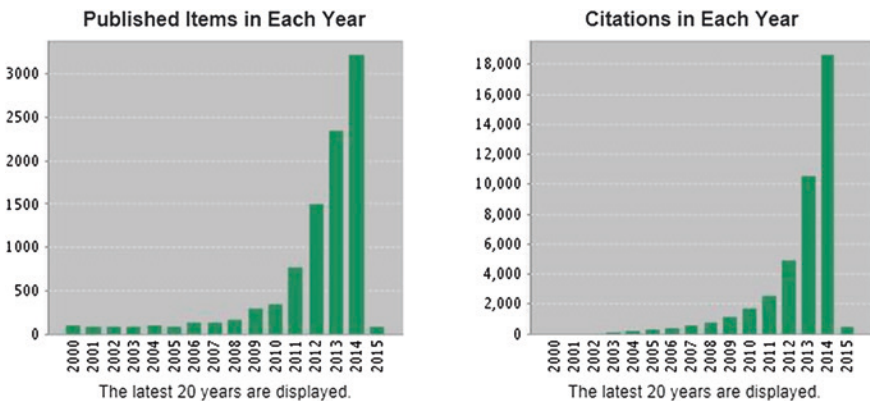


Fig. 5 KAU published papers and citations in ISI ranked journals

14 Research Groups

KAU initiated the idea of forming research groups to enhance cooperation between researchers from different specializations. Each group consists of up to 15 researchers under the leadership of one prominent scientist. It includes one adjunct professor and academics of all ranks including fresh academics and graduate students. Each research group has a main broad specialization that is different from the specializations of other groups. The research proposals submitted by research groups are prioritized in terms of funding over proposals submitted by individuals. To date, 45 research groups have been formed covering a wide spectrum of specializations including: the Diabetes Research Group; the Oral and Dental Diseases Research Group; the Renewable Energy Group; the Software Engineering and Distributed Systems Group; the Economic and Market Research Group; the Nonlinear Analysis and Applied Mathematics Group and the Biotechnology Group.

In addition to publishing papers in ISI ranked journals, the research groups are requested to work on projects that benefit the local Saudi community and wider society.

15 Patents Unit

To encourage scholars to patent their scientific results, KAU has established a unit which is assigned the task of assisting scientists with the paperwork and procedures required for patent registration. The unit conducts patent documentations and pays all required fees. The unit also handles all legal issues relating to patent registration.

Scholars endeavoring to secure patent registration are required to sign contracts with KAU, whereupon KAU has the right to share with the scholars subsequent benefits stemming from the patent. To date, KAU originating patents have been registered in the USA, the UK, Europe, Japan, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

16 Scientific and Academic Chairs

A Chair is an academic honor bestowed on scientists in recognition of achievements in their field of study or their potential to contribute to an area of study. The chairs are funded by individuals, companies, or organizations to enhance the excellence and high caliber of research in certain areas.

All scientific chairs at KAU are endowed chairs. They are intended to enhance the recruitment, retention, and support of outstanding individuals working to advance the strategic interests of KAU by enhancing knowledge in a particular

discipline or field. Endowed chairs at KAU are responsible for leading research and academic activities in a variety of disciplines throughout the university and have made significant contributions to the academic and research community.

The KAU Research Chairs Program is part of the university's strategy to become a distinguished research and development university by attracting and retaining some of the most accomplished and promising academically talented individuals. Candidates for the Research Chairs are nominated by KAU higher administration and are required to be of full professor status.

KAU is now home to approximately 30 scientific chairs, and the number is increasing annually. Current chairs include: the Prince Naif Chair for Moral Values, the SABIC Chair in Heterogeneous Catalysts, the Al-Amoudi Chair for Diabetic Foot Research, the ARAMCO Non-Destructive Testing Chair, and the Bin Zoma Group Chair for Bottled Water Research.

17 The International Advisory Board

One of the steps toward achieving world-class university status that KAU has taken is the formation of its International Advisory Board (IAB). The goals of the IAB are to review, evaluate, and introduce innovative ideas and analysis drawn from the experience and expertise of international academic and industrial authorities in order to assist KAU in the enhancement of its academic and educational status. IAB members are prominent university presidents and other luminaries associated with the employment market. Meetings are biannual and involve brainstorming sessions where discussions are held concerning significant matters related to KAU. Time is also devoted by IAB members at home to prepare advice on KAU issues. Some sessions are to meet with professors, students, and top KAU management to acquire hands-on experience of the facts on the ground at the university. Topics that have been discussed to date in IAB meetings include internationalization, strategies to boost and enhance scientific research, creativity and innovation, sustaining excellence in teaching and learning, and other macro issues. The first meeting of the IAB was devoted to providing information on KAU and its Strategic Plan while the subsequent meetings were for in-depth discussion on the aforementioned issues. The majority of the outcome ideas of the IAB are implemented as they are recognized as representing current best practice approaches from distinguished and acclaimed international authorities and institutions.

18 Distinguished Scientists Program

The second meeting of KAU International Advisory Board (IAB), which was dedicated to identify suitable ways of upgrading the university's scientific research, stressed the necessity of utilizing distinguished scholars to support and enrich the

university's scientific research. Consequently, KAU began the process of attracting a number of eminent scholars, widely cited by other researchers, in line with the IAB's recommendations.

In compliance with IAB advice which aims to strengthen KAU academics' and graduate students' competencies, to create closer academic contact with qualified outside scholars and researchers, and to help transfer the experiences and expertise of international scholars and researchers, KAU is currently collaborating with some 60 international distinguished scientists. This program has produced fruitful results including:

- the promotion of scientific research;
- the exchange of ideas between local and international researchers;
- the issuance of world-class scientific journals;
- the provision of a supportive academic environment conducive to motivating innovation;
- promotion and encouragement of excellence, invention, and talents;
- the encouragement support and upgrading of scientific research, particularly applied scientific research intended for service to, and the development of, the local community and Saudi society.

19 Endowment

Several years ago, KAU announced an exceedingly generous "Research Endowment Fund" with the intention of ensuring the sustainability of its scientific research.

Endowment played a memorable role in the history of Islamic civilization. Endowment was the basis of the historical Islamic Scientific Renaissance. It provided a stable environment for scientists and science students and ensured sustainable resources which allowed Islamic scholars a degree of freedom of research and enabled them to dedicate time to scientific output. The result was a rich heritage of knowledge in various fields stemming from the renaissance.

KAU decided to revive this important role of financing Islamic civilization-constructive projects, particularly concerning scientific research and technological development.

20 Research Centers

The creation of capacity for research excellence is a critical strategy driven by national governments. Research universities are central to the quest for world-class university status. Research missions are also integral to representing and achieving value for money concerning all aspects of research.

KAU has established several independent research centers to provide graduate education, conduct increasing fundamental research crossover in all major subjects, and attract additional qualified academic staff to participate in the global knowledge market. In order to enhance the international status and visible profile of its research capacity, KAU has placed great efforts on intensifying research missions in research centers, including enlarging the scale of graduate education, increasing funding, and creating foundations for the promotion of research projects.

Research centers form an integral part of the academic system of KAU, where all academic staff who desire to work in research are brought together to create a cross-disciplinary research environment for knowledge development. The King Fahd Center for Medical Research, the Center of Nanotechnology, and the Water Research Center are examples of currently available research centers.

Some of the research centers are classified as Centers of Excellence and hence receive direct budgets from the Ministry of Education. These centers are unique in the Kingdom. They are required to offer their facilities as platforms and venues for researchers from all the Kingdom's universities. The Center of Excellence of Genomic Medicine Research, the Center of Excellence in Environmental Studies, and the Center of Excellence for Osteoporosis Research are examples of KAU Centers of Excellence.

21 2015 and Beyond

During 2014, KAU was working on its 3rd Strategic Plan (2015–2019). It was presented to the IAB in its 7th meeting that was held in November 2014, and valuable comments were obtained. Figure 6 shows the differences between the various strategic plans of KAU. The 1st Strategic Plan (2005–2009) was to place KAU in an advanced position. The 2nd Strategic Plan (2009–2014) was to place KAU in a pioneering position, and the 3rd Strategic Plan (2015–2019) is intended to position KAU as an internationally recognized higher educational and academic benchmark of excellence. More details are shown in Fig. 7. Overall, the 1st Strategic Plan worked in breadth, the 2nd Strategic Plan worked in depth, while the 3rd Strategic Plan is to work 'in focus' toward achievement of internationally recognized World-Class University status and ranking.



Fig. 6 The philosophy behind KAU strategic plans



Fig. 7 The scope of each KAU strategic plan

22 Conclusion

In conclusion, KAU sought to achieve the highest possible standards in academic excellence in order to build a world-class university. This is in alignment with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's national higher education strategy. It is concluded that with realistic planning it is possible to achieve the worthy and vital objective of academic and educational world-class excellence in higher education.

The process of construction of the steps of building a world-class university in order to increase its international profile's visibility and its ability to compete educationally and academically in the global academic arena needs to be accelerated. KAU has identified and implemented appropriate strategies in order to improve educational and academic quality and achieve world-class university status. Achievement of this status inevitably involves an improvement in the overall quality in higher education. Well-oriented development plans have been adopted to enhance the current position of KAU in the different ranking systems. Other factors have equal importance, including quality improvement, research centers' development, and the critical factor of quality assurance.

Funding is recognized as a crucial factor for preparing to create a world-class university. Public funding from the governmental budget is integral to the operation of higher educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. Due to the size of its learning community, instructional and research capacity, and infrastructural facilities, KAU is inevitably more expensive to manage and requires more resources and funds to maintain than are required by some other universities in the Kingdom. However, it is an eminently worthwhile investment for the Ministry of Education to fund KAU's quest to achieve world-class university status, as allocated funds are carefully, scientifically, and accurately directed by concerned researchers and authorities. This careful and precise utilization of financial resources in conjunction with all the factors previously outlined ensures a high probability of achievement of the desired and expected results. The results of these efforts will ensure that KAU satisfies the criteria for world-class university status by the achievement of genuine and credible internationally recognized higher academic and educational excellence and the creation of a university offering a fully comprehensive range of undergraduate and graduate programs. These concerted and focused efforts represent a concentrated and carefully directed investment in Saudi human resources, which without doubt, will enrich the local community and Saudi society.

The continuous gracious and generous support received from the Government of Saudi Arabia has been of crucial importance in the transformation of King Abdulaziz University to a modern university of internationally recognized educational and academic standing. In recent years, the university has received concrete evidence of its emerging and improving internationally recognized academic and educational status. KAU has been placed among the top 400 universities of the world, in the three major international university ranking lists: the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWA), the Times Higher Education ranking, and QS ranking.

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