Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ministry of Higher Education
Office of the Deputy Minister for Educational Affairs

The National Report

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Section 1
Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed an all inclusive developmental revival in all fields and at all levels. Since higher education is one of the most important pillars of the nation, it has been privileged with generous financial grants which assisted in the creation of new universities, as well as pure and applied science colleges. The number of universities has now reached 21 public universities and 7 private institutions.

This development is the result of a huge demand for higher education. The number of secondary school graduates has increased in the past 10 years with high growth rates that reached more than 400% during the year AH 1428-1429 (2008-2009), which caused a great demand on institutions of higher learning in order to absorb these graduates. The number of freshmen in public universities has increased until it reached more than 200,000 male and female students in 2008.

The ratio of acceptance of secondary graduates in institutions of higher learning has continued to grow until in 2008 it reached 88% of the total graduates for the year 2008-2009. This percentage is considered one of the highest levels of acceptance at the international level. Large scale development in the arena of higher education has enabled it to increase the number of students accepted in AH 1429 to more than six times their number in AH 1413.

As we are discussing higher education, we must remark upon the Program of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz for Study Abroad, which now sponsors more than 50 thousand students studying abroad.

The Strategic Plan for Higher Education in the Kingdom, recently completed by the Ministry of Higher Education, has outlined the visions, directions, and practical programs for university education in the next two decades, so as to guarantee the realization of the goals and ambitions of this sector.

In continuation of these development plans and important achievements, higher education in the Kingdom is proceeding rapidly to overcome difficulties in the way of institutional renewal and increase in capacity. It seeks to multiply its sources of financing, elevate the level quality and its internal and external competence, diversify its outputs, increase its varieties, and concentrate on matching higher education with the needs of the labor market and comprehensive national developmental requirements. At the same time, higher education strives to fulfill royal directives regarding the establishment of institutions of higher education in the different regions and provinces of the Kingdom in a manner designed to serve the needs of Saudi citizens, and to be in harmony with future strategic plans for the development of institutions of higher learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

1.1. A brief account of higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Ministry of Higher Education prepared a developmental plan for the past four years (AH 1426-1430/2005-2009) designed to complete the projects begun in the previous plans, and to initiate new programs and projects which would focus on important fields and areas such as quality and academic accreditation, and the development of curriculum in such a way that the products of higher education become more in consonance with the needs of the labor market and national development. This was seen as especially important after women's colleges and teacher preparation colleges were joined to the universities under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education. In addition, new universities have been set up distributed in the different regions of the Kingdom. Great efforts have been undertaken to develop those new universities and to equip them to carry out the basic educational duties assigned to them, together with other endeavors aimed to further develop universities already established, and to concentrate on programs of quality, excellence, creativity, and partnership with distinguished international educational institutions. The Ministry seeks to realize those strategic goals in accordance with the following points:

-   **First:** Admission capacity for institutions of higher education in the Kingdom.
-   **Second:** Matching university education with the requirements of national development.
-   **Third:** Quality in higher education.
-   **Fourth:** Development of scholarly research serving the goals of development .
-   **Fifth:** Build international strategic partnerships in the realm of higher education.
-   **Sixth:** Firmly establish and strengthen modern administration in higher education sectors.
-   **Seventh:** Diversification of resources in financing higher education.
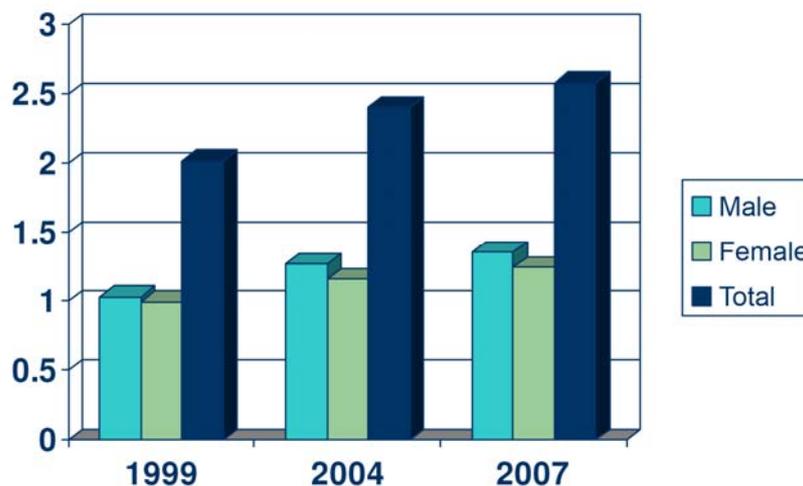
Growth in the numbers of the population in the higher education age bracket (18-24 years) (million individuals)

1.2. Facts and numbers according regarding local variations

- The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a vast country. Its area is two and a quarter million square kilometers, or roughly one-quarter of the area of the European continent.
  - The Saudi economy is almost entirely dependent on a single source of income and that is oil, which makes it susceptible to fluctuations in the price of oil, according to local, national, and international conditions. However, the Kingdom's economy is at present heading in the direction of diversification of sources of revenue.
- The rate of growth of the Kingdom's population is one of the highest in the world at roughly 3%. At the same time, the percentage of citizens less than twenty-four years of age is more than 62%. The number of high school graduates has increased many times during the past fourteen years. In the period AH 1413-1428 (1993-2008), for example, the number of high school graduates increased by 443%.
- The geographical distribution of population centers and difference in their age groups poses a challenge to institutions of higher learning.
- The huge increase in the number of high school graduates has created a tremendous gap between the demand for higher education and the supply offered by higher education institutions.
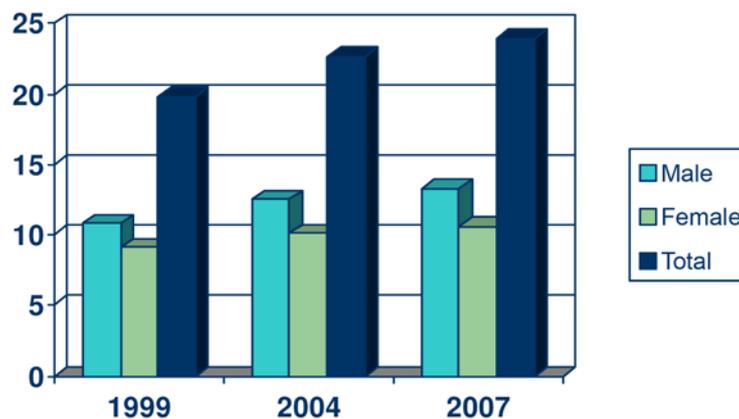
**Growth of population in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
(million individuals)**

1.3. International changes in the higher education sector

In addition to local variables, the higher education system in the Kingdom has been affected by international developments and changes during the past two decades, the most prominent of which are the following:
- Significant attention has been paid to building an information society which is concerned with concentration on the development and dissemination of information and its use in different production and service activities.
- The quality of qualifications of members of a society, and the pivotal role higher education plays in the preparation of qualified individuals capable of using information, skills and applied knowledge, as well as the type and quality of programs offered.

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- Investment of technical and scientific knowledge and development of practical means to implement it, such as science parks, technical incubators, venture capital markets, and encouragement of companies which have a scientific and technical basis.
- Restructuring by universities of their plans, programs, and methods of presentation of knowledge and skills in a way which will enable the student to enter a market based on knowledge.
- The appearance of new concepts in the arena of international higher education which have been adopted by international organizations and approved by national policies, including: the right to education, universal education, equal opportunity, quality, academic accreditation, the return from education, cost, the developmental task of education, internal efficiency, and external efficiency.
- The extensive development in communications and information technology, and the development of new educational formats, like distant education, electronic learning, and virtual universities.
- The diversification of sources for financing institutions of higher education and the participation of nongovernmental sectors in financing institutions of higher education.

1.4. How did the Ministry react to these changes?

Despite the changes and challenges which confronted higher education in the Kingdom, it has been able to achieve clear accomplishments at the levels of students and graduates, and the diversity of institutions of higher education. Higher education did not face these challenges in an unprepared way, rather it was equipped with scientific studies which took into account the goals, policies and programs specified by the government's five-year development plans, utilizing international experiences in developing the system of higher education through a variety of initiatives, programs and procedures, as well as short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans.

In order to face these challenges, higher education adopted two parallel tracks:
- A short-term track: in which the Ministry concentrated on issues related to admission and capacity, and synchronization with the labor market.
- A long-term track: in which the Ministry continued to tackle matters of admission and suitability, in addition to other important matters including: quality, diversification of sources of financing, academic research, grants for study abroad, modernization of administrative organizations, international cooperation, and strategic planning.

Development initiatives, plans and programs are characterized by the following qualities:
- Diversification and comprehensiveness for the various sectors of higher education.
- Flexibility in reacting to local, regional, and international changes.
- Taking the needs of the community into account and keeping up to par with the requirements of development.
- Benefiting from international experience and positive interaction with globalization.

- Creation of a competitive environment between universities and presentation of the support needed to reinforce creativity and distinction in them.
- Realization of comprehensive standards of excellence for programs and institutions ensuring attainment of the highest levels.
- Enabling universities and institutions of higher education to benefit from one another through inter-learning, and making them into learning organizations.

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Section Two
The Most Important Achievements

2.1. Establishment of international strategic partnerships

In order to raise the level of higher education and its institutions in the Kingdom to the level of developed countries, the Ministry of Higher Education has adopted a number of policies and initiatives designed to strengthen international cooperation.

2.1.1. Cooperation with international universities

The Ministry of Higher Education has supported the Kingdom's universities in their efforts to enter into agreements and partnerships with a number of international research centers and universities in order to benefit from their experience in the development of systems of higher education and to improve the educational process. The Ministry, for example, has supported King Saud University, which was able to sign fifty-four agreements with universities and research centers in France, the United States, Britain, India, China, Germany, Sweden, and Singapore. The Ministry has also supported King Abdulaziz University, which succeeded in signing fifteen similar agreements, while also lending its support to recently established universities in the Kingdom in their efforts to sign agreements of a similar nature.

2.1.2. Attracting distinguished scholars and professors

The Ministry of Higher Education has also supported some universities in their efforts aimed at attracting distinguished professors and Nobel Prize laureates to teach and supervise graduate students. As an example, King Saud University signed contracts of service with fourteen Nobel laureates. It has also brought in more than five hundred professors and researchers in the past two years.

2.1.3. International consultative councils

The Ministry of Higher Education has also encouraged the formation of international consultative councils in a number of Saudi universities in order to attract distinguished international experts and to benefit from them in developing institutions of higher learning. In this regard, both King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and King Abdulaziz University established international consultative councils bringing together a number of prominent scholars who have been awarded international prizes, such as the Nobel Prize or the King Faisal International Prize.

2.2. Diversification of sources for financing higher education

The Ministry of Higher Education in the Kingdom has worked towards increasing the participation of nongovernmental sectors in financing and developing institutions of higher education throughout the Kingdom, in line with its awareness of the importance

of the role of these sectors in financing higher education programs. Some of the projects and programs currently being implemented are presented below.

2.2.1. Obtaining endowments for universities

The Ministry has supported the launch of programs aimed at encouraging wealthy individuals and businessmen to endow universities. King Saud University launched the University Endowment Program and has been able to secure endowments in the value of 950 million Saudi riyals out of a targeted ten billion. Likewise, donations collected for the Research and Educational Programs Support Fund at King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals have reached 200 million riyals. Likewise, King Abdulaziz University and the rest of the universities in the Kingdom have inaugurated university endowment programs aimed at diversifying their sources of income.

2.2.2. University facilities

Investment of university facilities is part of an orientation which aims to build strategic relations with the Kingdom's business sector through a number of instruments and programs. Some universities also plan to invest tens of millions in facilities and towers to be built in the technology valleys of King Saud University and King Fahd University. In addition, some universities have developed executive Master's degree programs in business administration, as well as parallel education and community service programs.

2.2.3. Endowed chairs

A number of universities in the Kingdom have endeavored to diversify their sources of financing by recruiting businessmen in major companies and foundations like SABIC, ARAMCO, Saudi Telecom, and the Saudi Electricity Company in order to support a number of scientific research chairs. In this regard, King Saud University, for instance, was able to sign contracts for nearly eighty research chairs with total funding surpassing 400 million riyals, and it is currently planning to expand the number of such chairs to 150 during the next two years.

2.2.4. Educational and research consulting services for universities

Universities in the Kingdom seek to expand the scope of consulting services which they provide to the local community. Most universities have established research institutes that offer consulting services, and carry out research and studies for the benefit of parties in both the private and public sectors. Returns from these activities contribute up to 25 % of the university budget, as is the case with King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals.

2.3. International and academic administration

The Ministry of Higher Education has taken measures designed to develop its administrative and technical sectors in order to increase their efficiency and improve their per-

formance. A number of important accomplishments have been achieved in this regard, for instance:

2.3.1. E-government

The Ministry has prepared twenty-one electronic systems and programs for its financial and administrative procedures and operations. In addition, it has developed a new data center, and connected all administrative units and departments in the Ministry to an integrated electronic network.

2.3.2. Electronic transaction systems

The Ministry has supported development of electronic transaction systems in Saudi universities. The universities, in turn, have created dedicated deanships and centers for this purpose, and this has contributed to bringing about an improvement in the level of administrative performance in Saudi universities.

2.3.3. University websites on the Internet

The Ministry is intent on supporting the intention of Saudi universities to develop electronic websites on the Internet in both Arabic and English, in order to provide support services for the educational process, including admission procedures, follow up of course material, or offering other services for the local community in addition to serving as a channel of communication with other sectors of society.

2.3.4. Higher education statistics system

Due to the importance of making a scientific decision based on correct data which will help in planning for the future, the Ministry has established a unit specialized in statistics related to higher education in order to provide data regarding the various dimensions of higher education.

2.3.5. Geographic information systems

The Ministry has completed a geographical information systems project for higher education. The aim of this project is to provide geographical information, such as the locations of higher education institutions, data on population, agriculture, industry, and commerce, highway networks, airports, and all other statistical data needed by institutions of higher education to make decisions based on up-to-date scientific foundations.

2.3.6. Infrastructure for the new universities

The Ministry seeks to complete infrastructure projects for the new universities so they can perform their functions as required Funds approved for the budgets of the new universities for the financial year AH 1427-1428 (2007-2008) reached an equivalent of fourteen billion Saudi riyals, covering more than 171 projects . This is in addition to more than a billion riyals from the budget surplus which has been earmarked for additional projects on the campuses of five other universities.

2.3.7. Agreements with distinguished international institutions

The Ministry has signed a number of agreements with distinguished international institutions in the areas of academic leadership training, in order to prepare leaders qualified in administering institutions of higher education in the Kingdom.

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Section Three
The Most Significant Challenges and the Ways in Which They Were Addressed

3.1. Capacity of higher education institutions

Due to high rate of population growth in the Kingdom, higher education has faced a huge challenge in the last decade to absorb secondary school graduates in the country's universities and colleges. The Ministry of Higher Education has worked to increase capacity to meet the increasing demand for university education among all classes of society in compliance with the directions of the Kingdom's political leadership. In order to accomplish this, a number of solutions have been put forward, including increasing absorption capacity, expanding private higher education, and launching new programs for studying abroad.

3.1.1. Increasing absorption capacity

The absorption capacity of the Kingdom's higher education institutions increased after the number of public universities was increased to 21, in addition to 7 private universities, which together contain 423 colleges in pure and applied fields of specialization. University education has also expanded geographically, to the extent that it now covers 76 provinces compared to 16 in the previous decade. This huge expansion in higher education institutions has enabled them to absorb more than 200,000 new male and female students in the current academic year AH 1429/1430 (2008/2009).

Percentage of growth in a number of typical colleges in the Kingdom during the period 2003-2009

	Specialization	Number of current colleges	Percent growth 2003-2009
1	Medicine and medical sciences	54	400%
2	Science	27	285%
3	Pharmacy	13	333%
4	Computer science	18	500%
5	Engineering	26	271%
6	Community colleges	52	160%

Growth in the number of graduates in public universities during the period 2002-2005

Growth in the number of freshmen in public universities during the period 2005-2008
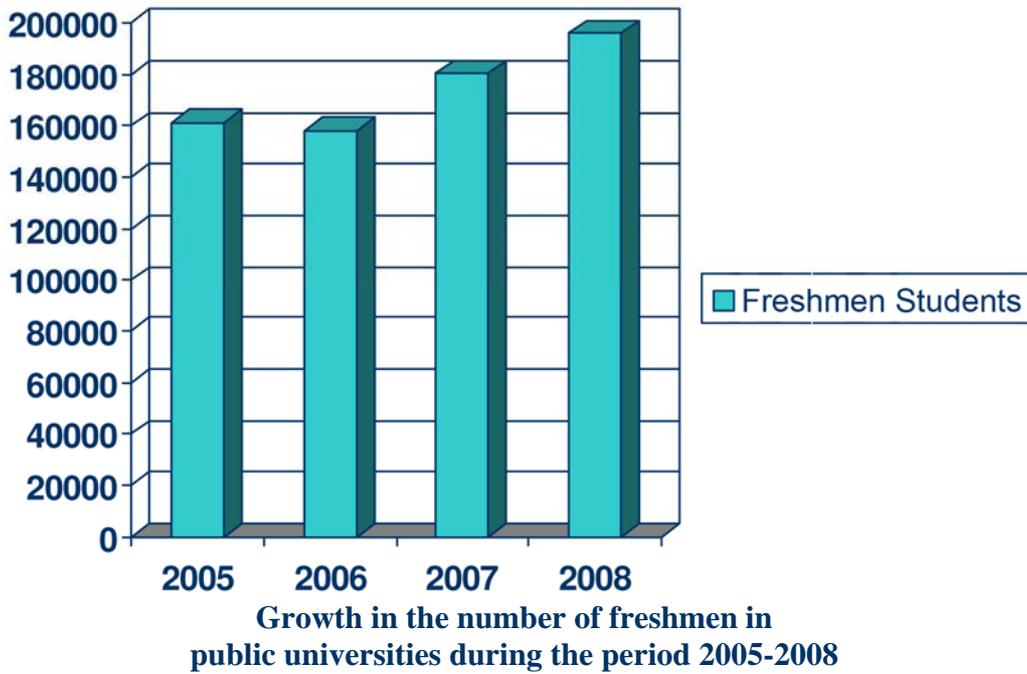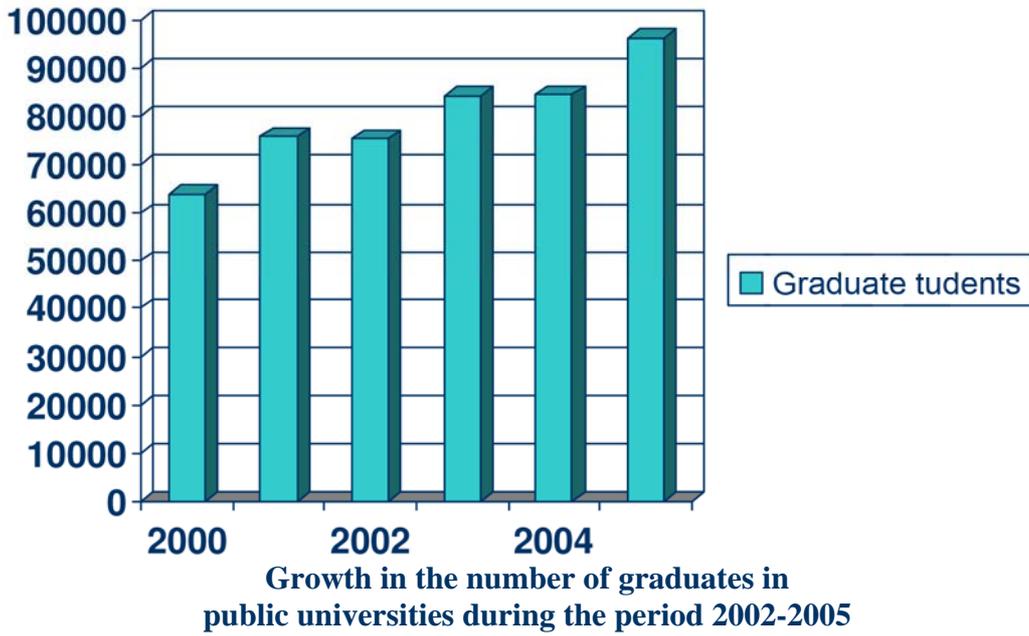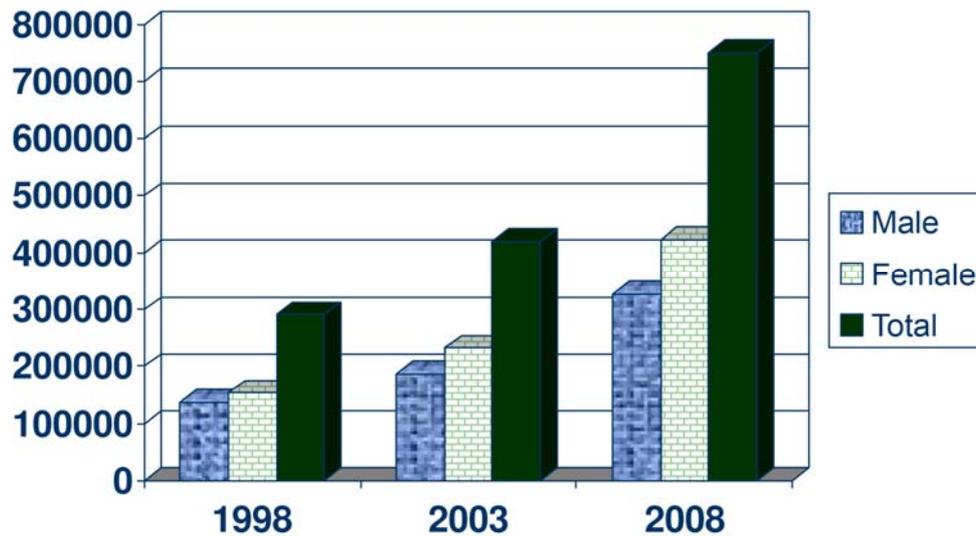
**Growth in the number of registered students
in public institutions of higher learning**

3.1.2. Expansion of private higher education

Private education has grown exponentially in the Kingdom. Since it began in AH 1421 (2001), the number of private institutions of higher education has reached 24 universities and colleges, which have achieved distinction in the quality of their programs and the development plans according to which they operate. The private higher education sector began with 550 male and female students, and has continued to expand until it reached around 30,000 male and female students in 2008. These universities and colleges work under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education, and all of their programs must abide by the standards set by the National Center for Academic Accreditation and Assessment, which is considered a condition for general and private authorization and accreditation. All the specializations of the private universities and colleges are linked to the needs of the labor market, both current and future, and have been selected very carefully so as to ensure the distinction of their products and their fulfillment of national developmental requirements. In line with its concern for raising the level of quality of the private institutions of higher learning, and in order to enable the greatest possible number of students to join them, in AH 1426 (2005), the Ministry of Higher Education put forward a project for 10,000 academic scholarships for private universities and colleges to be spread over a period of five years. These scholarships are granted based on the students' levels of academic performance, in addition to the evaluation reports regarding institutions and programs presented by the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment. These scholarships include full grants that completely cover tuition fees, as well as partial grants that cover a proportion of the educational fees in various specialties needed by the labor market. And because of the importance of benefiting from the experience of international universities, most private universities and colleges in the Kingdom have entered into contracts of cooperation and partnership with a number of prestigious international universities.

3.1.3. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program for Study Abroad

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program for Study Abroad was launched with the purpose of achieving a qualitative leap in the level of graduates of higher education in fields needed by the country at the level of the bachelor's degree, the master's degree, the PhD, in addition to medical fellowships, and to raise these graduates to international levels. The program of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz for Study Abroad was launched in 2005 with 2800 students sent to study abroad, and now encompasses more than 50,000 students studying abroad in vital specialties and in prestigious universities in a number of countries including the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, Holland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Japan, Malaysia, China, India, Singapore, and South Korea.

3.2. Coordination between university education and the needs of national development

Coordination between university education and the needs of national development is one of the most important factors affecting decision making in the Ministry and in the universities. During the past years, the Ministry of Higher Education has sought to ensure that the programs and specialties offered by institutions of university education are related to the needs of national development and in line with the Kingdom's growth and economic development, as well as with the changes which both of these factors represent in the processes of supply and demand of human resources in the labor market in both the public and private sectors.

It is noticeable that, until recently, there was no problem in coordination, because the country was in urgent need of all university graduates in all specializations. However, after the implementation of the successive development plans and the increase in the number of university graduates, there appeared a gradual sufficiency in some specialties. And it is evident for persons specialized in university education that it is difficult to change the structure of programs and specializations in a short time. This is what prompted the Ministry of Higher Education in AH 1419 (1989) to adopt a plan comprising important policies aimed at bringing about such coordination, including:

**Established and restructured colleges
during the period 2006-2009**
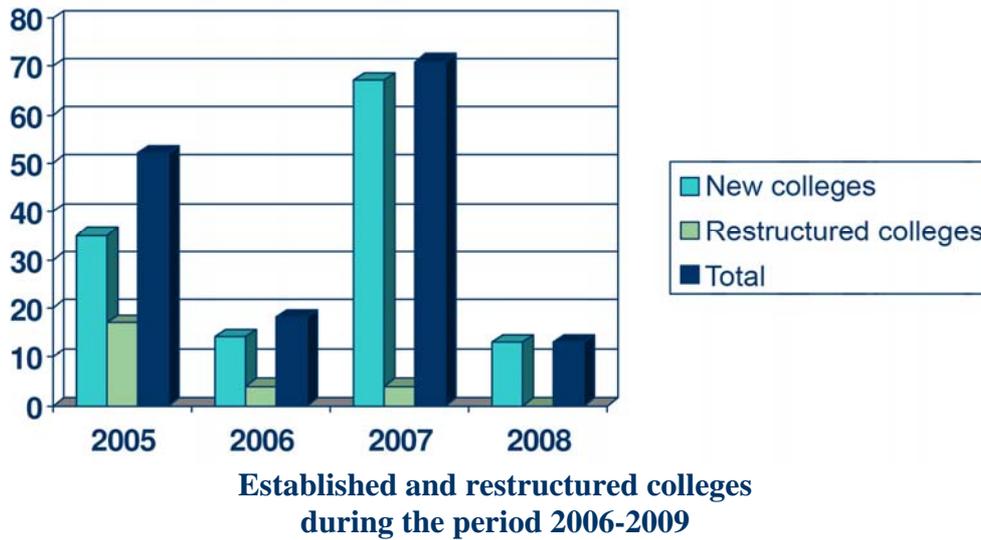
3.2.1. Inauguration of new colleges

The Ministry of Higher Education has expanding the inauguration of colleges that are directly related to the requirements of national development. Thus, during just the last four years, the Ministry has established 154 colleges, all of them in applied medical, engineering, and scientific specializations in different public universities.

3.2.2. Restructuring of some existing colleges

The Ministry of Higher Education has worked on restructuring colleges, programs, and specializations in order to meet the needs of development and the labor market, in line with international developments. It has integrated new academic departments and created others, while some departments have been transformed into colleges. Graduate study programs have also been developed. As a result of these changes, the percentage of admissions in specializations related to the labor market this year has reached 85% for male students and 70% for female students. The Ministry of Higher Education emphasizes the importance of achieving a balance in higher education outputs between knowledge production and development through gradual and balanced change in some academic specializations to match development requirements.

3.2.3. Increasing the number of community colleges

Community colleges contribute to the diversification of higher education programs, prepare secondary school graduates to join the labor market in productive fields by means of qualification programs, and strengthen skill acquisition through training programs. The number of community colleges opened so far has reached 51 colleges which incorporate a number of departments that are in line with the needs of development and the requirements of the labor market. What makes community colleges unique is the fact that they focus on academic achievements and cooperative training during study in applied and professional specializations that the labor market needs.

Specializations in these colleges focus on are concentrated in a number of specific fields that relate to the requirements of development, such as applied ancillary medical sciences, computer and network technology, biology and microbiology laboratory technician training, English language, marketing, financial management, accounting, and the like. Programs have been set up in coordination with a number of authorities related to the labor market.

3.3. Quality requirements

The Ministry of Higher Education endeavors to raise the level of excellence and fulfill its requirements in the various higher education institutions. It also works to strengthen and invigorate the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment. The Ministry has taken up a number of serious steps designed to elevate the level of excellence in institutions of higher education, including:

3.3.1. Outcome-based education

The Ministry of Higher Education has worked to review plans and curricula in order to connect education with output. The majority of universities around the world have begun to concentrate on this new approach due to its importance in improving the quality of outcomes and also because it complements another approach in university education, known as problem-based learning. Many Saudi universities have undertaken self-assessment of their programs on this basis.

3.3.2. Programs to strengthen student skills

The graduate is the primary target for any higher education institution; consequently, the Ministry has given its support to a group of programs in Saudi universities concerned with developing the quality of the products of higher education. This is to be accomplished by means of a two-pronged plan: a specialized academic path dedicated to preparing students in their areas of specialization; and a practical skill-based track which focuses on developing students' skills in communication and the use of technology, while also developing their personal skills.

These programs were prepared after careful study of programs in prestigious universities and some universities of applied studies in the developed countries. Examples of these programs include: preparatory year programs, centers for developing and refining personal skills, communication skills, research skills and self-learning skills for both male and female students. The Ministry of Higher Education has contracted with a number of companies and organizations to train students and organize periodic field visits.

3.3.3. External competence

Raising the external competence of universities through elevation of the quality of outcomes and quality verification via the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment which follows:
- Fulfillment of the requirements of self-assessment by the universities.

- The development of a national framework for qualifications and commitment to quality requirements with regard to programs, students, administration, and faculty, as along with other requirements.

3.3.4. Development infrastructure

Special offices headed by deans and vice-deans have been established in Saudi universities to ensure quality and academic accreditation, development of university plans, modernization of internal systems, professional development of faculty, and development of creativity and distinction, in addition to other aspects. For instance, some universities have established a special deanship for skill development and a vice-deanship concerned with development and quality assurance in every college, a unit for overall quality assurance, and offices for quality assurance in every college. Furthermore, some universities have taken the initiative of establishing a center for academic measurement, assessment and accreditation, and an institute for administrative development and distinction, as well as a center for entrepreneurship

3.3.5. International partnerships

In order to remain in stride with international developments and to take advantage of international experience in the realm of higher education, the Ministry has established international and academic relationships and partnerships with a number of international programs and universities in France, Britain, Germany, Singapore, and China in order to profit from their experience in higher education management, improve the educational process, and invigorate academic research.

3.3.6. Admissions tests

In order to raise the internal competence of the universities and to ensure the excellence of university education inputs, the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment has developed during the last years a number of tests relevant to its field of endeavor, including:
- General proficiency test (Arabic and English) for secondary school graduates.
- Achievement test.
- Proficiency test for university students.
- General proficiency test for female students.
- English language test.
- General proficiency test for talented students.

The center has achieved concrete results reflected in the quality of the students entering the Kingdom's universities and colleges. Many of the tests provided by the center have been approved as a primary criterion for admission.

3.3.7. Creativity and Distinction Project

Based on a firm conviction in the importance of faculty in raising the level of quality in Saudi universities, the Ministry of Higher Education has worked on following up and completing the Creativity and Distinction Project for faculty, which be-

gan to be implemented three years ago. This project involves a number of programs such as:

- Electronic education and publication, and using the internet in education.

- Teaching skills and effective teaching.

- Research, training, and statistical analysis skills.

- Design exams and assessment skills.

- Communication skills, and academic leadership skills,

- Independent topics (strategic planning, information development, thought engineering, and quality applications).

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Section Four
Policies Sanctioned in Higher Education

The Ministry of Higher Education has adopted a number of policies that aim to make use of the most up-to-date practice from around the world and employ it in the service of national development, including the following

4.1. Investment in quality

The assurance of excellence in the realm of higher education is one of the basic pillars upon which any effort to raise the educational process to levels that which enable it to successfully compete on regional and international levels. Among the most important programs in the area of higher education policy is the establishment of the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment and the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education.

4.1.1 National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA)

The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), established in 2004, is a legal person with administrative and financial independence, and which operates under the supervision of the Higher Education Council. The Commission is the authority responsible for matters of academic accreditation for higher education institutions above the secondary level with the exception of military education. The Commission aspires to become a leading and distinguished body, locally and internationally, in the field of assessment and academic accreditation. It has defined its role as being regulation of the quality of higher education with the goal of guaranteeing the proficiency of its graduates to meet the needs of the labor market.

The tasks of the Commissions are as follows:
- Define rules, standards and conditions of assessment and academic accreditation; draft controls to guarantee their application in post secondary academic institutions.
- Draft rules and framework criteria related to the practice of academic work, such as teaching and training; draft controls to guarantee the application of such rules in different academic institutions; prepare regulations to govern the supervision of academic vocations in such institutions.
- General accreditation for new university institutions or their equivalents, such as colleges and institutes, along with accreditation of their departments, specializations and academic plans.
- Periodic review and assessment of academic performance of existing university organizations or their equivalents, such as colleges and institutes, and academic accreditation of their departments and educational plans and assessing them periodically.

- Coordinate academic accreditation of programs and departments in higher education institutions in the Kingdom by international accreditation authorities.
- Assessment and accreditation of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs, as well as post-graduate diploma programs. along with periodic reviews of program requirements.
- Assessment and accreditation of post-secondary school academic specialization programs, such as middle college programs , and public or private scientific diplomas.
- Assessment and accreditation of training and educational programs in public and private educational institutes.
- Suggest general plans for the development of academic performance in different fields. The Commission may set up permanent academic committees as well as other permanent or temporary auxiliary committees, whose members would be chosen the members of the Commission or others.
- Publication of accreditation information and data for purposes of education, information, and research and also making such information available to interested parties.

4.1.2. National Center for Assessment in Higher Education (NCAHE)

Today, the trend around the world is to establish national assessment and measurement centers staffed by experts and professors in different fields, and supported by a team of experts in assessment and measurement drawn from the humanities, psychology, sociology, mathematics, and analytical statistics. Accordingly, the Ministry established the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education in 2000, for the purpose of defining and applying admission and measurement standards in the Kingdom. The Center began work in 2002 with programs designed to serve the needs of the educational process in the Kingdom's higher education institutions. It offers its services to a large number of institutions of higher education that wish to undertake educational measurement in accordance with objective scientific methods, and which aspire to a higher level of fairness in processing student admissions.

The objectives of the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education (NCAHE) include:
- Take a leading role in the development of educational measurement tools for all levels of higher education.
- Participate in raising the level of performance and efficiency in higher education through the measurement of educational and achievement indicators.
- Prepare admission tests for higher education institutions.
- Offer consulting services for assessment centers in different educational institutions.
- Keep abreast of scholarly research and conduct research and studies in the field of educational assessment.

The Center offers the following tests:
- General proficiency test for secondary school graduates (science and arts majors).
- General proficiency test for graduate students.
- Scientific achievement test for science students.
- Linguistic skills proficiency test in the English language.
- General tourism guidance test.

The center has derived great benefit from international experience in the area of its specialization, which has enabled it to realize significant achievements in a relatively short time frame. Its services have been sanctioned in a number of Gulf countries including Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar.

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Section Five
Initiatives and Renewal

5.1. Scientific research

The Ministry of Higher Education seeks to actively participate in building a society and economy based on information through the establishment of an effective and vigorous system of scientific research, side by side with a number of important initiatives.

5.1.1. Projects for university centers of research excellence

The Ministry of Higher Education aims, through the establishment of centers of research excellence, to encourage Saudi universities to devote attention to academic research and technical development. These centers seek to carry out research and scientific activities concentrated in specific fields of national and strategic importance, to prepare a scientific and research environment conducive to enabling researchers and graduate students to conduct scientific research, develop advanced technologies that would enable the Kingdom to take a leading position in the centers' fields of specialization. These centers also participate in strengthening cooperation with national industries, and with relevant distinguished international research centers.

In establishing these centers, the Ministry has adopted a competitive approach based on standards and qualities specific to the centers of excellence, accompanied by international evaluation and with complete financing for five years with periodical assessment.

The Ministry of Higher Education has supported the establishment of a number of centers of research excellence in a number of Saudi universities, including the following:
- Center of Excellence for Research in Engineering Materials (CEREM)
- Center of Excellence in Genomic Medicine Research (CEGMR)
- Center of Research Excellence in Petroleum Refining and Petrochemicals (CoRE-PRP)
- Center of Palms and Dates Research
- Center of Excellence in Biotechnology Research
- Center of Excellence in Environmental Studies
- Center of Research Excellence in Renewable Energy (CoRE-RE)
- Center of Excellence in Hajj and Omrah Research (CEHOR)
- The Excellence Center of Science and Mathematics Education
- Center of Research Excellence in Corrosion (CoRE-C)
- Research Excellence Center in Jurisprudence of Contemporary Issues
- Center of Excellence for Research in Osteoporosis
- Center of Research Excellence in Desalination Technology

5.1.2. Collaborative research centers

In keeping with the trend toward strengthening scientific research in the Kingdom's universities, in AH 1430/2009, the Ministry of Higher Education launched an initiative for the establishment of collaborative research centers. The goal of these centers is to complement and strengthen scientific research and to provide newly-established universities with opportunities to establish centers for scientific research which would constitute the kernel for future research centers designed to serve many new fields consistent with the international scientific trends.

5.1.3. Support for scientific research

The Ministry of Higher Education has extended its support for scientific research in universities by increasing the numbers of graduate students studying abroad, and by expanding specialized research centers, such as nanotechnology research centers of and centers specialized in petrochemicals, information technology, and social issues such as observation of social change, and biotechnology. In addition, 41 annually updatable indicators of scientific research performance in Saudi universities have been prepared .

5.1.4. King Abdullah Institutes for Nanotechnology

In accordance with the directives of the Custodian of the Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz regarding the importance of nanotechnology and the need to make use of it in national development, the Ministry of Higher Education has established four nanotechnology research centers, located in King Saud University, King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals, King Abdulaziz University, and Taibah University. The Ministry has continued to follow-up with these universities regarding completion of infrastructure for the new centers and the launching of their programs.

5.1.5. Research chairs

Research chairs constitute a form of social partnership in support of a system of research in strategic scientific fields. The Ministry has expended considerable efforts to support the establishment of research chairs in Saudi universities. For example, there are now a total of 80 research chairs in King Saud University, 15 in King Abdulaziz University, and 14 at King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals.

5.1.6. Graduate studies

A number of Saudi universities strive to attract distinguished non-Saudi graduate students. In this way, the Islamic University, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, King Saud University, King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals, and Umm Al-Qura University among others have all attracted a large number of foreign students of different nationalities who are pursuing their gradu-

ate studies and working in the centers of excellence and research chair programs. To date, a total of 8435 students from Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia have been granted scholarships to study in the Kingdom's universities.

5.1.7. Research, publication and protection of intellectual property

The Ministry of Higher Education encourages distinguished research and publication in international scientific journals, by providing a variety of incentives for this purpose. The Ministry also encourages universities researchers to obtain patents for their inventions. More than 50 patents have so far been awarded to faculty at Saudi universities.

5.2. Creativity and distinction

The faculty are one of the main pillars of university education, as well as one of the major constituents of the education process due to the pivotal role they play in realizing the major objective of the educational and research process, which is the transfer of scientific information and the intellectual development of students.

In light of this pivotal role of the university faculty, the Ministry of Higher Education has launched a project for the development of creativity and distinction among them, and has encouraged universities to establish an institutional apparatus for this purpose. Thus, some universities have established deanships for academic development, which seek to generalize successful experiences, and introduce new projects that benefit from international experience in development. In addition, they have developed and refined the professional and individual aspects of faculty members through their participation in internal and external training programs.

The project is based on two training tracks: an internal track which comprises teaching skills, effective teaching methods, electronic learning and publication, and the use of the Internet in education. The other track is external, manifested in encouraging Saudi universities to profit from the scientific and technological advancement which has been achieved by a number of international universities.

5.3. Translation of university textbooks

The Ministry of Higher Education has launched an ambitious project for translation with two different tracks. The first track aims at enriching the Arabic university library with a collection of leading international books on issues of importance to higher education, especially works dealing with planning in higher education, administration, quality, teaching methods, etc. So far, 68 books have been published in this series. The second track aims to translate the most prominent university textbooks in a variety of specializations in the basic sciences, engineering sciences, the humanities and other fields. This project constitutes a practical measure designed to facilitate the transfer of the latest scientific information to university students in the Arabic language, and also to enrich the Arabic library with the most widely-used references and university textbooks around the world.

5.4. Scholarly organizations

Scholarly organizations play a pioneering role in the development of scientific and professional performance, for they define the standards and values of scientific specialties and represent scientific organizations focused solely on advancing the field, and defining the quality levels which must be adhered to therein. Such organizations also participate in building information societies. Saudi universities currently encompass 123 scientific organizations.

For these reasons, the Ministry of Higher Education has launched competitive projects to encourage these organizations to engage in creative activities that achieve their objectives, in accordance with the latest international trends, to develop their bylaws and the level of their administrative and technical organization, as well as their frameworks, to diversify the financial resources that support their activities and programs, and to create international alliances for them. This is in addition to the support the Ministry of Higher Education provides to these organizations through financing the establishment of headquarters for them to enable them to act independently and develop their professional activities.

5.5. Academic departments

The Ministry of Higher Education has launched a project for competition among Saudi universities aimed at the development of their academic departments in order to elevate their level in accordance with a set of principles derived from observation of the current situation of higher education. These include the increased demand for higher university education; the social, economic and political changes experienced by modern societies; and the role given to higher education in sustainable development. All this has given prime importance to the issue of the development of academic departments in the universities because the department is the essential core in the structure of the university and the development of its performance. This project aims to improve the department's educational environment and infrastructure, and to encourage the public and private sectors to participate in the development processes, and building partnerships with distinguished departments around the world.

5.6. Student counseling

The Ministry of Higher Education has launched a project in which Saudi universities compete to develop student counseling programs and services, the goal being to create the foundation for specialized counseling centers, designed to offer a variety of counseling programs to fulfill the psychological, social, educational, and career needs of students. The Ministry has supported more than 49 counseling programs in several Saudi universities.

5.7. The National Center for E-Learning and Distance Learning

The National Center for E-Learning and Distance Learning embodies the Kingdom's outlook and strategy for the horizons of the promising future of education, for it constitutes the cornerstone and main support for the realm of electronic learning. The estab-

lishment of this center by the Ministry of Higher Education in 2006 was a constructive step designed create an outlook that focuses on working to fulfill the Kingdom's mission of spreading knowledge and information on the basis of lofty Islamic values. The goal is to achieve this objective through the establishment of a national center which supports all the different stages of the educational process and all groups of learners towards whom this process is directed. In such a way, it will allow the creation of unique educational environments which combine to build a broad educational system known as blend education. The Center would aims to fulfill the needs of university education in the Kingdom and set up electronic education centers in the regions. The Center's mission arises from its conviction regarding the need to utilize all available capabilities to support the educational process in university education institutions through the optimal use of information technology in order to strengthen communication and answer the needs of society in such a way which would enable individuals to realize their ambitions and to develop their scientific and practical abilities.

The Center's objectives include the following:

- Disseminate e-learning and distance learning applications in university education institutions in accordance with quality standards.
- Participate in extending the absorptive capacity of university education institutions through e-learning and distance learning applications.
- Spread awareness about technology, and e-learning and distance learning culture, as a contribution towards building an information society.
- Take part in the evaluation of projects and programs of e-learning and distance learning.
- Support research and studies in the fields of e-learning and distance learning.
- Set specific standards to design, produce and publish digital educational materials.
- Provide consulting services to parties concerned with e-learning and distance education.
- Build educational computer programs and distribute them to serve the educational process in both the public and private sectors.
- Encourage outstanding projects in the fields of e-learning and distance education in the university education institutions.
- Hold meetings, and organize conferences and workshops that contribute to the development of e-learning and distance education.
- Cooperation with international organizations and agencies, and other parties concerned with the fields of e-learning and distance education.

Since its inception, the Center has worked to launch a set of services, programs and projects in the field of its expertise targeting higher education, including:

- Jusur, which is the name of a comprehensive system of programs responsible for the administration of the process of electronic learning. The learner can check his own webpage to access his grades as well as his homework. The teacher can design electronic exams through a Learning Management System (LMS), administer them to his students and store the students' grades electronically in special tables. These are in addition to other features and services offered to learners, teachers, and administrators.

- Maknaz, the Saudi thesaurus for educational units, a national electronic thesaurus which has been compiled and developed to facilitate the process of creating, storing, retrieving, reusing, and sharing educational units; it constitutes a source of support for the work of the Saudi universities as well as a foundation for the creation of high-quality low-cost digital educational courses.

- The Saudi Center for Support and Guidance, which aims to establish and operate a comprehensive infrastructure to support and assist the programs of the national center and the centers for student support and guidance in Saudi universities. It also seeks to extend the scope of student guidance programs and services in the Kingdom's universities and to make them available at the national level.

- The Arabic Digital Library (AskZad): The library aims to improve the educational process in the Kingdom by supporting the learning and education system generally, and e-learning and distance education specifically, and to provide the requirements of scientific research. Another of the most important objectives of this library is to serve electronic education by providing electronic courses with sources and reference materials that are important for the student and the teacher alike. The library contains around ninety thousand titles for digital books and references from the most well-known publishers around the world; they are all available to university students and faculty.

- Local and international partnership program: Since its inception, the Center has entered into a number of international and local alliances and agreements. So far, the Center has signed memoranda of understanding 14 universities, in addition to international agreements with Malaysia, South Korea, and Australia.

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Section 6
Plan for the Future of University Education in the Kingdom (Horizons)

6.1. Nature of the plan

The Ministry of Higher Education took the initiative of undertaking a comprehensive development project, one of whose main points was the preparation of a long-term plan for university education in the Kingdom, with the objective of improving its positive aspects and facing both current and future challenges. This project was known as "Plan for the Future of University Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" (Horizons). The range of operation of this plan has been defined as university education, that is, the public and private universities and colleges operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education, while taking into consideration issues of common concern with other relevant parties.

The project aimed to prepare a twenty-five year plan to define the outlook and mission of university education in the Kingdom, along with its needs, forms, various outcomes, and sources of financial support. It also sought to develop an executive plan for the first five years of the project, and to set up a mechanism for the adoption of methods of strategic planning in university education institutions.

The process followed in the preparation of the plan depended on many basic principles derived from adherence to Islamic teachings, and the fulfillment of the expectations and directives of the political leadership which has given its attention to different aspects of development, with priority given to the education sector. It also sought to fulfill the objectives of higher education policies in the Kingdom, building on the initiatives and achievements accomplished in this sector during the last few years. These principles include: future-based planning, synchronization with other national plans, coordination with international trends and experience in higher education, increasing the participation of relevant parties and incorporating their expectations, building a culture of strategic planning in the universities, along with a commitment to ensure quality.

In order to assure that the strategy covers all aspects of higher education, it was divided into eight tracks: admission and absorption; faculty, employees, and students; programs and curricula; research and inventions; management and administration; finance; information technology; and infrastructure.

6.2. The Strategic Objectives of the Plan for the Future of University Education

- Offer opportunities for university education to qualified students, and to respond to the increased demand for them.
- Meet the future requirements of information production, fulfill the needs of the labor market, to develop society, and to increase external qualification.

- Increase the internal qualification of university education institutions.
- Achieve a balanced student/faculty ratio consistent with the general average for optimal international practices.
- Increase the percentage of faculty holding doctoral degrees, develop their skills, motivate them, and retain them.
- Increase the performance level of employees, raise their qualifications, and develop their skills.
- Increase the competitive capabilities of students, develop their skills, and strengthen their qualifications.
- Improve educational content, teaching and learning methods, methods of assessment, through creativity and diversification.
- Improve the quality of academic programs and obtain local and international accreditation.
- Provide an adequate number of researchers consistent with international averages.
- Increase spending on scientific research in accordance with optimal international practices.
- Bolster research productive capacity and originality, along with an increase in quality.
- Strengthen the methodology of scientific research management, realize coordination in it, and provide a motivating environment for it.
- Strengthen flexibility and response while keeping corporate accountability in the university education system.
- Distinction in leadership, cooperation, and transparency in the university education system.
- Continue to provide free university education along with diversification of the sources of finance.
- Provide a low-cost high-speed Internet-based communications network for university education institutions.
- Match and complement information technology strategies and educational, research and administrative applications and systems in university education institutions.
- Produce and publish digital information content in all fields, available to those associated with higher education and to the society at large.
- Continue infrastructure development, and to provide a stimulating environment for the educational process and scientific research.

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Section 7
Horizons of Arab Cooperation

The Kingdom is keen to support joint Arab endeavors, and encourages Arab cooperation. In accordance with this policy, the Kingdom works at the level of the activities of the UNESCO office in Beirut, at the level of meetings of ministers of higher education, university presidents or specialized committees of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and at the level of the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), to contribute effectively to build an effective Arab higher education atmosphere. Some of the efforts and suggestions made by the Kingdom in this regard are as follows:

- The Kingdom was among the countries that signed the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States (UNESCO 1978). The Kingdom participated in the meetings held in Beirut in 2005 and in Dubai in 2007, in order to review this agreement and develop its goals to accommodate the many new developments in higher education in Arab countries.

- The Kingdom established the Center for Higher Education Statistics and is working on developing a committee for recognition of degrees as a step towards a higher education information center whose goal would be to support joint Arab efforts aimed at building a database for higher education in the Arab World.

- The Kingdom has supported the Arab Open University as a joint Arab organization, and emphasizes the importance of studying any new initiatives for its development for the benefit of higher education in the Arab World.

- The Kingdom is considered to be one of the countries which gives the greatest support for the education movement, for its universities employ a larger number of Arab faculty compared with the other Arab countries. The number of Saudi students in universities in other Arab countries is also considered greater than those coming from any other Arab country; most of them study at their own expense or on government scholarships. At the same time, the Kingdom offers academic scholarships to citizens of Arab and Islamic countries in almost all its universities, and works to increase the number of such scholarships as indicated in its higher education plans and the plans of its universities.

- In addition to its activities at the UNESCO and ALECSO, the Kingdom has contributed to the dialogue between the GCC and the European Union in October 2008. The Kingdom also worked on drafting directives in Sweden at the beginning of 2009 with the purpose of invigorating Gulf-European and Arab-European cooperation, during the Swedish chairmanship of the EU, which starts at the beginning of July 2009.

- The Kingdom, along with some other Arab countries, has participated in UNESCO dialogues with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris, which resulted in guidelines for cross-border higher education which aim to organize the relationship between the parties concerned with this type of education and lay down principles to protect users.

- From 17-20 Safar AH 1428 (24-27 Feb. 2009), King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals organized the 2nd Conference Planning and Development of Education and Scientific Research in the Arab States to support joint efforts in scientific research in the Arab World.
- The Kingdom was one of the participants in the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education that resulted in the Beirut Declaration (March 1998) in preparation for the World Conference of Higher Education (Paris, October 1998). Through its participation in this conference, the Kingdom demonstrated its support for all Arab-Arab and Arab-European efforts, as well as Arab cooperation with other regions, in pursuit of the development of higher education, assurance of its quality, extending participation in it, and exchange of experience regarding new developments.

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Conclusion

The National Report addressed many of the achievements of the Ministry of Higher Education during the period 1998-2008, the challenges which it faced, and the policies which it adopted in order to raise the higher education sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to levels consistent with the course of the nation's development plans, as well as the ambitions of Saudi society. The Ministry of Higher Education has stressed the importance of profiting from international experience in the area of higher education, and communication with the authorities concerned with the development of this human development vital sector, reaching order to attain the planned objectives. The Ministry benefited from international experience in the development of the higher education system through a set of policies, programs, and short and long-tem plans. As for the short term, there was a focus on urgent issues, such as admission and absorption, and compatibility with the labor market. With regards to the long-term, the Ministry continued to pursue its interest in strategic issues including the development of the components of the academic environment (the educational environment, faculty members, students, academic programs and plans), in addition to programs such as the development of university education for women, strengthening academic quality, foreign study programs, new university projects, and other strategic programs whose goal is to raise this sector to a level where it can compete on regional as well as international levels in the short term.

The report reviewed a number of institutes, centers and agencies that emerged from the development strategy, as well as programs and initiatives that have been implemented.

The Ministry of Higher Education will continue to pursue organized strategic and institutional development of the higher education sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia though the following:

1. Continue the expansion of higher education so that it covers all cities and provinces of the Kingdom in order to provide greater opportunities for higher education for the sons and daughters of this country.
2. Continue working to build a strong relationship with the finance and business sector and scientific and social organizations.
3. Benefit from useful aspects of globalization, such as increasing transparency, implementing modern management and administration methods in the management and development of higher education institutions and their infrastructure in accordance with the latest international standards.
4. Improve the level of quality in students admitted as well as graduates, and ensure quality in academic and administrative processes and practices and services in the educational environment and educational institutions.
5. Strengthen research and development with an emphasis on distinction, in individual universities and between universities; link scientific research with the requirements of national developmental needs and the needs of the labor market.
6. Pursue partnerships and alliances with distinguished Arab and international institutions of higher education.

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