

## OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC STRENGTH

Saudi Arabia 2017 | EDUCATION | INTERVIEW

**TBY talks to Issa Al-Ansari, Rector of Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU), on the institution's strengths, attracting students from overseas, and expectations for 2018.**



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### BIOGRAPHY

Rector of Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU), Issa Al-Ansari is an eminent figure in the education sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at a time of colossal educational reforms in the Kingdom. He pioneered the startup of this remarkable North American model university in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, the Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, PMU, established in 2006. During that same period and until 2013, he also became the special advisor to the Governor of the Eastern Province HRH Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd, also Chair of the Board of Trustees. He is also Secretary General of Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Foundation for Humanitarian Development with its local and international branches, and has worked restlessly to engage in humanitarian projects locally and internationally to serve humanitarian causes in the areas related to rights to education, poverty eradication, integration of individuals with special needs, youth, and female empowerment.

### What are the PMU's main academic strengths?

At the very start, the founder of PMU, HRH Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Bin Abdulaziz, decided that the new institution should represent a remarkable addition to existing higher education institutions in the Kingdom. Therefore, the design of the PMU system and academic programs followed the most developed and effective methodologies, which resulted in a university encompassing the most effective learning environment. An outstanding academic strength of PMU is the adoption of the Core Curriculum, which is designed and included in the curricula of all colleges. The Core Curriculum is designed to enable the students to acquire the competencies they need to be successful in their chosen fields and to contribute to the development of their community and the Kingdom. These competencies are: communication, technological

aims to develop the student as a whole person. A learning outcomes assessment process is continually applied so as to ensure that all objectives are successfully accomplished and required improvements are constantly introduced. By adopting a student-centered approach, we aim at enhancing students' abilities to develop as life long-learners and pursue improvement during their studies and long after they have graduated.

### **What do you think about some of the changes that will arise for the Eastern Province?**

The Eastern Province is the most important industrial and business region in the Kingdom. It embraces the Oil industry and the main and longest oil reserves in the world. There are also the basic industries of the Kingdom represented by the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) and a lot of other industries such as food industries and manufacturing industries. As such, the Eastern Province is poised to develop more and more and will continue attracting more and more people to work and live in it. Therefore, there will definitely be constant progress and development in main and support sectors. This will be reflected in increased business, urbanization and a proliferation of recreational and service institutions. In addition, there will be an increase in educational institutions including colleges and universities.



### **What do you gain from your international partnerships and will you be looking more toward increasing the number of foreign students?**

We have international partnerships in many parts of the world. We gain an international outlook to diversity and successful practices witnessed in different higher education institutions around the world. Currently, we are establishing three Arabic language programs, namely in Turkey, Kazakhstan, and China. We have developed international collaboration programs with a number of renowned universities, such as the University Of Central Florida

(UCF), which houses the Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program for Strategic Research and Studies. We have also developed collaboration with the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), which houses the King Abdulaziz Endowed Chair for Islamic Studies, and we have established the King Fahd program for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine. Regarding student diversity, the Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Scholarship Program, which is implemented in collaboration with the Arab League, has hosted more than 40 students from the Arab world on full scholarships and the same program is now being established with Turkey and Kazakhstan.

### **What are your expectations and key strategic objectives for 2018?**

School, and the Teaching Hospital. By this we hope to continue serving education in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and preparing global graduates that will assume leading roles locally and internationally.

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**ABDULAZIZ BIN ABDULRAHMAN AL SAUWAIYAN**

**Rector**

*Hafr Al Batin University*

The university was established by Royal decree in 2014. It consisted of two main branches, the girls' section, which was part of the Dammam University, and the boys' section, which was part of King Fahd University Petroleum and Minerals. There were challenges, one of which was to have a unified set of procedures. We are making a great effort to harmonize the two branches. The courses were gender-segregated; the girls' branch taught Arabic, humanities, and education-related subjects whereas the boys' branch concentrated on engineering and sciences. We are gradually introducing arts programs in the boys' section. On the other hand, we are also introducing technical subjects in the girls' section, for example computer science and administrative sciences.



**ABDULAZIZ BIN QUBLAN AL-SARRANI**

**President**

*Taibah University*

We have many international partnerships and have made many agreements to enhance the quality of our academic programs. Our College of Medicine has made an agreement with the College of Medicine at Manchester University to adopt its academic program, and our College of Education has made an agreement with George Washington University to present a joint PhD program. Our College of Engineering has an agreement with Pennsylvania State University for a “3+1 program,” whereby our undergraduate students study the first three years in Taibah University and then the final year at Penn State. We are trying to have similar 3+1 programs with other international partners across different academic programs. We have a total of 28 memoranda of understanding and service contracts, such as UTM in Malaysia among others. One of our goals is to expand our pool of international partners. The first step is to achieve the national institutional accreditation from the NCAAA, which will pave the way for our future goals.



**MAREI HUSSAIN AL-QATANI**

**President**

*Jazan University*

Jazan University has only been around 12 years, making it one of the newest universities in Saudi Arabia. Today we are one of the biggest in Saudi Arabia as well, with 63,000 students. But there is a great deal of work to be done with regard to our research capacity. Thus far, our research has not been at the level we want it to be. We have various publications in big medical journals, but there is still a long way to go. We are not in the highest ranks of research but have a plan to get to that level. We have three research centers that we are building up, one for medical research, one for environmental sciences, and a third one that relates to the khat plant and its various medical and other uses. Our budget of SAR10 million (USD2.67 million) is not enough to support our research initiatives, and thus we are trying to expand that budget and find other areas of funding.



**SUHAIR HASSAN**

**President**

*Dar Al Hekma University*

We are working on the new programs in partnership with other institutions. We are starting a master's degree program with Berkeley in architecture. We are also starting some specific PhD, master's, and vocational training programs in partnership with Lancaster University. We have another partnership with Babson on entrepreneurship. We keep adding to our range of programs as we move forward because we have to be very flexible under the 2030 Vision. Dar Al Hekma University is mobilizing efforts to pass legislation that would allow us access to Zakat funds, which are charitable donations people make here every year. This would be a big deal, because billions are collected annually. So, if we became a channel for some of those funds, it would make our university more sustainable as a non-profit organization. This legislation would also help other entities that are not publicly funded at the moment.

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