

Riyadh Statement On World Class University System

Higher education is central to participation in the global knowledge economy. Universities provide the highly trained personnel required by countries for the 21st-century economy. For individuals, higher education is a key to both knowledge and mobility. For society, universities are rich sources of research, analysis, and commentary. Higher education is central to the knowledge ecology of our age; and creating and sustaining higher education systems to serve society's needs, as well individual aspirations, is a central goal of every nation.

The knowledge ecology has to foster the translation of knowledge—traditional and modern, old and new, global and local, artistic and scientific—from research to practice and practice to research. It has to advance knowledge and its application to address the problems of society. It has to maintain continuity with the past, change the present, and construct the future. It has to conserve, consume, and create knowledge. It has to unleash the power of knowledge.

In this age of ubiquitous information and global competition, a world-class university system is the engine that can drive the indigenous knowledge ecology of a knowledge-based economy. Such a system should permeate all aspects of the knowledge environment: absorbing global knowledge and localizing it; seeking local knowledge and globalizing it; and discovering new knowledge to add to the global-knowledge ecology. Thus, the system should help apply the best global knowledge to solve local problems and present critical local problems for solutions by the best minds around the globe. The goal is to catalyze innovation and entrepreneurship of ideas, products, and services—by letting the winds of knowledge blow from around the world without losing its identity.

A world-class university system should face both outward and inward at the same time. It should provide opportunities to the best and the brightest of the world, as well as to those citizens denied and deprived of opportunities by circumstances of demography, distance, and other differences. The system should include a diverse spectrum of universities—the globally selective and exclusive as well as the locally open and inclusive—providing access to excellence to all, differentiated by their mission but integrated by their motivation into a synergistic system for the well being of the country.

A world-class university system should have a harmonious mix of research, teaching, service, and development. While some universities in the system may emphasize one of these divisions over another, they should engage a unity of vision in their diverse commitments. Excellence in research often claims the highest prestige and is most easily measured. Rankings of universities, generally based on research alone, are misleading in judging the health of a university system. Excellence in teaching, service, and development must be valued equally in the system as a whole although individual universities may have specific strengths in research or other areas. A university system needs to be judged holistically based on its contribution to the knowledge ecology, the economy, and to growth and development of the people.

The success of a world-class university system should be measured by the transformation to the knowledge-based economy and not by the global rankings of its universities.

A world-class university system has to embrace the arts and the sciences, the professions and the vocations—the philosophical and the practical. It has to encapsulate the mind, body, and soul of the knowledge ecology and the knowledge economy. The activities of some disciplines may be quite well known and others less visible; the outcomes of some may be tangible and of others intangible; the effects of some may be immediate and of others long-term; and, the contributions of some may be explicit and of others tacit. All of these aspects of fields of study have to be part of a world-class university system:

- Educate the next generation for citizenship, leadership and participation in the knowledge economy;
- Provide access as broadly as possible to enhance social mobility;
- Conduct research that will contribute to society and the economy;
- Conduct basic research that will contribute to the advancement of knowledge;
- Interpret, critique, and preserve the cultural patrimony of society; and
- Serve as a forum for discussion and analysis.

A world-class university system is, therefore, complex and differentiated. It includes various kinds of academic institutions that all contribute to the knowledge ecology. Typically, a national university system contains a small number of research universities that offer graduate and professional degrees and are highly selective in terms of students at the top, a much larger sector of teaching-oriented universities that may conduct limited research and mainly offer undergraduate degrees, and a sector of vocationally oriented postsecondary institutions at the bottom that typically do not offer bachelor's degrees. All of these segments require coordination and articulation in order to serve diverse needs.

Building a world-class higher education system requires careful coordination of resources and a focus on the entire spectrum of higher education institutions and goals—the big picture rather than just rankings and league tables. This development requires a universal vision, unity of purpose, and a unique identity to build a sustainable knowledge ecology, which in turn can transform the country into a knowledge-based economy. It requires also the capacity to evaluate the effectiveness of academic systems through appropriate benchmarking and quality-assurance arrangements, to ensure that the several levels of the system are functioning successfully. Quality assurance is difficult because of the varied academic responsibilities that need to be measured. In addition, many key aspects of academic work are not easily measured, such as the quality of teaching or the impact of learning on students.

We are committed to a differentiated world-class higher education system that serves the needs of people and society and links higher education institutions globally.