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Gulf Affairs: Kuwait's private higher education sector was launched in the early 2000s. What progress has been made in this sector so far?

Habib Abul: Since the Private Universities Council (PUC) law was issued in 2000, numerous licenses have been granted to universities, colleges and international branch campuses (IBCs). Today, we have 12 private educational institutions that offer diplomas, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. These institutions offer diverse course programs that are important to the Kuwaiti labor market and economy.

Gulf Affairs: What is the PUC's model? And what is the scope of its regulatory activities?

Abul: When it comes to private higher education, PUC is responsible for everything from A to Z, including initial approvals and accreditation of certificates. After an application has been submitted with a corresponding market study, feasibility study, accreditation requirements and facilities proposal, licenses are then issued. Of course, all these materials have to meet international accreditation standards. Once operational, PUC conducts ongoing institutional accreditation and facility reviews to maintain quality control. PUC also offers and manages comprehensive scholarship programs in order to provide Kuwaiti students

IV. Interviews

with the financial means to achieve their educational aspirations.

Gulf Affairs: What are the main challenges facing higher education and vocational training in Kuwait today? What is PUC doing to help address these challenges? Any key results on the impact of your work?

Abul: From an investor's point of view, a university has to be built with ample space to allow for the construction of a high-quality campus. The land limitations in Kuwait hinder the rapid expansion of private higher institutions. To address this challenge, PUC acquired several large land plots throughout the country and has provided leasing facilities—in coordination with the Ministry of Finance—to investors. Because of this arrangement, many institutions were able to start their operations.

Another key challenge is adequately preparing high school students for university. Therefore, PUC has decided to cover the cost of foundation years for scholarship students in English, math and science courses. Students and universities have flourished as a result. In the past four years, private colleges and universities in Kuwait have become competitive with international universities in a range of sectors, and have contributed to workshops, international conferences and competitions—students have even won many prizes in these competitions. In addition, private universities in Kuwait have become accredited from several major international accreditation organizations.

Gulf Affairs: PUC notably provides scholarships for thousands of students to study in Kuwait. What is the motive behind this policy? How does it contribute to the fulfilment of higher education needs in Kuwait?

Abul: The number of high school graduates has been increasing and Kuwait University (KU), which is the only public higher education institution in the country, is unable to cope with demand. In order to resolve this issue, PUC started the internal scholarship program, which has helped sponsor tens of thousands of students since its inception. This program also helps reduce the cost of higher education because study abroad scholarships are much more expensive. This approach reduces overall education costs for the government. In the past few years, approximately 4,000 students annually were granted these internal scholarships.

Gulf Affairs: Do private higher education institutions in Kuwait offer enough course subjects to support economic development and the labor market's needs?

Abul: Currently, universities cover a wide spectrum of course specializations, ranging from business, to engineering, to computer sciences, to information technology to social and legal sciences. We are also working on introducing other course programs including various medical science majors. Based on feasibility studies that have been conducted, we believe that these disciplines cover a wide range of market demand.

Gulf Affairs: There is an international trend of increasing student demand for post-graduate programs. What share does post-graduate education make up among Kuwait's institutions?

Abul: Several higher education institutions are licensed to provide post-graduate education in subjects including business and law, while engineering is in preparation. Advanced degrees complement tertiary education, and we encourage institutions to expand their course offerings beyond the bachelor's degree level.

el. That's as long as certain conditions and regulations are met so that we can ensure the quality of these degrees remains high.

Gulf Affairs: In your view, what distinguishes Kuwait's private higher education scene?

Abul: One distinction is that it is governed by legal regulations that allow institutes to compete on an equal basis with public institutions. Private higher education institutions benefit from PUC being the sole regulatory body, and all private higher education institutes have to be either affiliated with or branches of top quality institutions. The internal scholarship program is also a unique aspect of Kuwait's private higher education scene.