



Transforming Education with a National Partnership

Ministry of Higher Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Quick Facts

National Partnership Profile

- › 32 public higher education institutions
- › 2.6 million users

Blackboard Solutions

- › Learning Insight
- › Mobile Learn
- › ConnectTxt
- › Strategic Services
- › Diamond Managed Hosting

In 1975 the government of Saudi Arabia launched a long-term plan to ensure its education system provided a highly skilled workforce to run the Kingdom's increasingly sophisticated economy. At that time only 7,000 students were enrolled at Saudi universities and colleges. Now there are around 1 million students in the Kingdom, half of them women. In 2003, Effat University, a women-only university in Jeddah, became the first Saudi institution to invest in Blackboard's solutions. Over the next six years, 13 more institutions followed suit.

The Vision

By the second decade of the 21st century, the Saudi Ministry of Education wanted its universities to adapt to the changing needs of the country's economy and wider society. They knew e-learning could make higher education accessible to more students, especially those living in remote areas or who combine study with work. It could also encourage collaboration between universities and enable new, nationally essential courses to be delivered quickly and efficiently.

The Solution: A national partnership for a new learning experience

Rather than encouraging universities to adopt e-learning on an individual basis, in 2013, the Ministry of Education formed a strategic national partnership with Blackboard. It wanted to place Blackboard's New Learning Experience at the heart of its strategy. Created for an emerging generation of non-traditional students, this new learner-centric



“Being selected as the teaching and learning environment of choice for all public universities in Saudi Arabia is a great recognition of the innovative value of our portfolio.”

Matt Small, Senior Vice-President and Managing Director, Blackboard International



“The national partnership means that universities can now focus 100% on education, not commercial negotiations or IT issues.”

Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Mosa, Saudi E-University Rector and former Deputy Education Minister

approach fosters better engagement, interaction, and learning through innovative technology, services, and data capabilities.

The Results

The national partnership was led by Saudi Electronic University (SeU), the first e-university in the Kingdom, which had begun working with Blackboard in 2012. Before the partnership 14 universities were using Blackboard Solutions. Within two years, the results of that collaboration were so impressive that the Ministry of Education chose to deploy Blackboard's entire portfolio of solutions to all 32 of their public higher education institutions.

To date, 27 public higher education institutions are exclusively using Blackboard solutions to support classroom activity, enable blended learning and provide fully online programs. Some of these institutions include: the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC), National Center for E-learning and Distance Education (NCEl) and Prince Sultan Military College of Health Sciences in Dhahran.

The partnership has proved a unique opportunity to raise the standard of academic training, teaching, and learning. It has also increased cooperation among institutions – both within Saudi Arabia and across Blackboard's global network of 19,000 client universities.

Implementation

The Ministry of Education and Blackboard partnership is based on a single national agreement, in which the Ministry buys user licenses in bulk and gives universities free access to all of Blackboard's solutions and services. This makes roll-out easier and minimizes costs for individual institutions.

Before the agreement there were Blackboard licences for 297,000 users in Saudi Arabia. Now more than 2 million student licences are active, with provision for a further 600,000.

Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Mosa, Rector of Saudi Electronic University and former Deputy Education Minister, explains: “The national partnership means that universities can now focus 100% on education, not commercial negotiations or IT issues.”

Different institutions had different implementation and adoption schedules: some were existing Blackboard users, while others were new to Blackboard's solutions. Despite this, the whole national implementation process took only 18 months.

All public universities in the Kingdom now have access to Blackboard's

complete Learning Insight solution, Mobile Learn and two-way SMS ConnectTxt solution, as well as Strategic Services and Diamond Managed Hosting. This combination of a powerful learning management system and collaborative learning environment, along with robust data analytics, is enabling institutions to:

- Measure and refine their online programs
- Access and understand data and insights
- Make data-driven decisions

All of which contributes to a more comprehensive learning environment that recognizes the real challenges and workflows of a modern university.

Tailored Features

Students across the Kingdom are now enjoying a new, transformative educational experience. “Blackboard has lots of tools and features, but they are easy to learn,” says Dr. Salem Alkhalaf, Vice Dean of e-Learning and Distance Learning at Qassim University. “Students can access vital information from any device and exchange ideas easily. This collaborative model reflects modern ways of working.”

In addition, Blackboard easily accommodates specific cultural characteristics. Solutions are fully localized and available in Arabic, English and 24 other languages. The platform was even adapted to support the Islamic Hijri calendar.

Strategic Services and Diamond Hosting

Transforming the higher education landscape of an entire country is a major undertaking and Blackboard’s strategic services team provided the Ministry with strategic support. Their 350+ years of combined consultancy experience, gained on more than 5,000 individual projects, helped drive transformation, manage change and turn a vision of the future into vivid reality.

The Ministry also opted for Blackboard’s Diamond Managed Hosting service which operates 24/7 in a T4 data center in the city of Riyadh, managing the risk, growth, change, and uptime of the online learning environment.

This service is particularly valuable in the evenings and overnight – a time when many students are at their computers, yet individual universities have the lowest IT staffing levels and the most junior personnel on duty. Blackboard’s subscription model and national

“Without this national partnership we would still be negotiating on price. Instead we are using our budget to train and support students and teachers.”

**Dr. Salem Alkhalaf, Vice Dean of
E-Learning and Distance Learning,
Qassim University**

partnership guarantee round-the-clock support.

Raising Standards

If adaptability is vital, so is standardization. The partnership with Blackboard is enabling the Ministry to take a strategic approach to education across the Kingdom. A common e-learning platform means it can quickly roll out courses that are nationally important. It can systematically create and distribute course content. It can raise standards so five million students in remote areas get the chance to achieve the same high level as those in major cities. It can spread best practice among teachers by bringing them together in virtual environments to enhance skills and share knowledge.

Benefits

The most immediate advantage of the national partnership approach is reduced cost and increased ROI. Individual universities no longer need their own license to use Blackboard products, which greatly reduces their administrative burden.

Another benefit is that universities that were previously undecided about whether to invest in online learning are now able to take the step much more easily. They get immediate access to every Blackboard solution, which means adoption is quicker. And because institutions across the country are using the same platform, it's simple to share courses among universities. Collaboration is straightforward and teaching staff find it easy to transfer between institutions. Course content may change, but the platform remains the same.

As well as improving collaboration between universities inside Saudi Arabia, this partnership has also expanded horizons. Blackboard's solutions are used by more than 19,000 institutions around the world, which makes it easy for Saudi Arabian universities to see how their overseas counterparts work and communicate.

Institutions can share teaching material, sub-license courses internationally and even hire external teachers

when they need extra staff. Working in a Blackboard virtual classroom means a professor can lecture from home in Florida or Amman to a group of students in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is seeing the benefits of raising its national education standards to an international level.

The reputation of both individual universities and the national education system is growing, as the quality of training and teaching improves. The Ministry is now developing globally recognized accreditation standards for all of its institutions.

Analytics

Because Blackboard Analytics means everything on the e-learning platform is recorded, it's easy to measure outcomes at every level: individual student; class; university; even national. Universities can assess course usability and individual training needs, while monitoring the performance of students and teaching staff.

At a ministry level, it's now possible to establish and optimize national benchmarks. The result is an education system that has higher standards, closer collaboration and a growing international reputation for excellence.

The national partnership with Blackboard means every student in Saudi Arabia can now get access to a gold standard of online education. It enables universities to focus on teaching, rather than administration or IT. And it saves money from the national education budget, while greatly improving ROI.

What's more, it is having a dramatic effect on standards and the reputation of both individual universities and the national education system. The quality of teaching and learning is improving, while opportunities for collaboration increase. Saudi Arabia is truly reaping the rewards of a national partnership approach.

To find out more about Blackboard's New Learning Experience email askus@blackboard.com or visit <http://go.blackboard.com/NLE>

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