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**Title**

It is better to light a candle than to ban the darkness : government led academic development in Saudi Arabian universities

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**Abstract**

At first glance, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's current multi-billion dollar investment in its social sector, especially in setting up new schools and universities, seems to have as its primary aim the preparation of the Kingdom for a future that is not dependent on its oil resources which are predicted to run out in less than a 100 years. However, there is another consideration that warrants examination in the current context. KSA is also positioning itself to assume a dominant role firstly among the Gulf countries, secondly in the Arabic world and thirdly globally. The two ambitions are obviously intertwined but are likely to have distinct impacts on the international academy. To this end, the Higher education sector has seen unprecedented growth both in student numbers and infrastructure due to the expenditure of massive amounts of money. More than 13 billion dollars is pumped into education and of this Higher Education receives more than two billion annually. However, because the main concern for KSA's Higher Education development is to maintain its Arabian base whilst striving to become internationally relevant, the funds are applied in a centrally controlled manner that

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aims to balance the two ambitions. In practice, the gender-based segregation is one issue that continues to be an unresolved and contested complication. This paper argues that ultimately international competitiveness is likely to be impact significantly and possibly irrevocably on Saudi cultural traditions and religion norms. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Onsman, Andrys, E-Mail: andrys.onsman@monash.edu