

The Contribution of Private Universities in Higher Education Equity in Kuwait*

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Abstract

It has become imperative to find a way to absorb rising numbers of students at Kuwait University, for several reasons. First, Kuwait University is the only state university in the country. Second, there is the goal of achieving social justice for Kuwaitis, and offering them the opportunity to receive high-quality higher education. Third, there is a need to avoid any negative impact on the University's mission and the standard of its graduates, due to the growing numbers of seekers of university education.

This paper addresses the issue of equal educational opportunities for qualified secondary school graduates in the State of Kuwait. A plan to take advantage of available capacity at private universities, through a system of internal scholarships, was launched during the 2006 / 2007 academic year, with 1,205 B.A. and M.A. scholarships. Employing a statistical methodology, the paper explains how the plan was derived. It also describes the participation program by private universities which, by providing tuition-fee support, was able to expand admission numbers by 20%, and has stepped up plans to absorb the additional demand.

The internal scholarships program addresses the numerous obstacles faced by the State of Kuwait in providing equal opportunities in higher education in view of the growing numbers of secondary school graduates. The costs of internal scholarships are low compared to the costs of scholarships to foreign universities or to establishing a new state university. Moreover, through state support for disciplines that meet the needs of the labour market and serve the community, the program achieves the objectives of the private universities law, as well as the goal of community development.

I. Introduction

In order to review the general framework of the University of Kuwait's strategic plan and the

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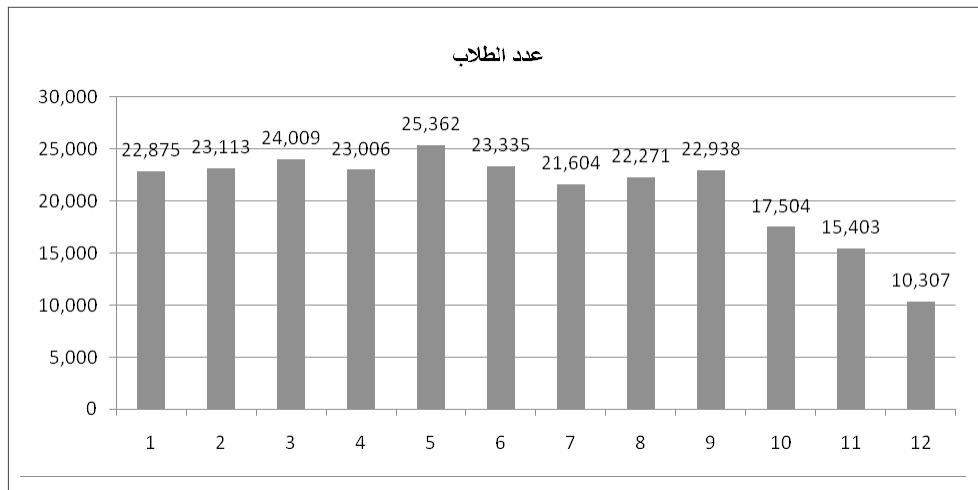
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short-term proposed admission plan (2005 / 2006 - 2009 / 2010, Kuwait University, 2005) an inventory of the enrolled students in all governmental schools (disregarding private schools where numbers are low compared to governmental schools) in Kuwait (from grade 1 to grade 12) has been assembled in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The numbers of students enrolled in governmental schools by grade (2006/ 2007)



Source: Ministry of Education's statistics

According to the Ministry of Education's statistics, the number of students able to fulfil admission conditions to the University of Kuwait in the coming years is increasing year-by-year. An analysis of the student numbers exceeding the absorption capacity of the University of Kuwait was carried out; it noted that the forecasted increase varies between 55% and 63%. See Table 1.

Table 1: Students numbers exceeding the University of Kuwait absorption capacity for three years

University year	High school graduates expected to graduate*	KU absorption capacity (according to the Plan)	Surplus (exceeding absorption capacity)	Surplus ratio
2008 /2009	7,635	4,910	2,725	55%
2009 /2010	7,912	5,005	2,907	58%
2010/ 2011	8,322	5,100	3,222	63%

* fulfilling University of Kuwait conditions for admission

The expected surplus of Kuwaiti graduates fulfilling admissions conditions is 8,854 students in the above mentioned three year period, with an average of 2,931 students yearly. The University of Kuwait, established in 1966, is the only governmental university. It has begun to



implement an ambitious construction plan to absorb 40,000 students in the future as indicated in the strategic plan. However, the plan's application was delayed and drastic changes in the absorption capacity became noticeable before 2014, the date marking the university's transfer to the new campus in the Shadadiya region. Therefore, the Kuwaiti legislature in 2000 agreed to allow the establishment of private universities through the promulgation of law number 34/2000 and its executive regulations. The law's explanatory note justifies the establishment of private universities by the fact that the University of Kuwait's absorption capacity is limited, and that the project wishes to increase students' chances of access to higher education. The goals of the private universities law were to achieve social justice among citizens; to give students the opportunity to access higher education, while ensuring a quality education; and to avoid any negative effects stemming from the increase in numbers on the university's educational mission and on the level of its graduates. It was necessary, therefore, to find a solution to accommodate these continually increasing numbers. The University of Kuwait attempted to address the numbers' issue in 2001 by raising admission grades, thus leading to the decline in the number of Kuwaiti high school graduates being accepted from an average of 42% to 32%. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Comparison between high school output and university input

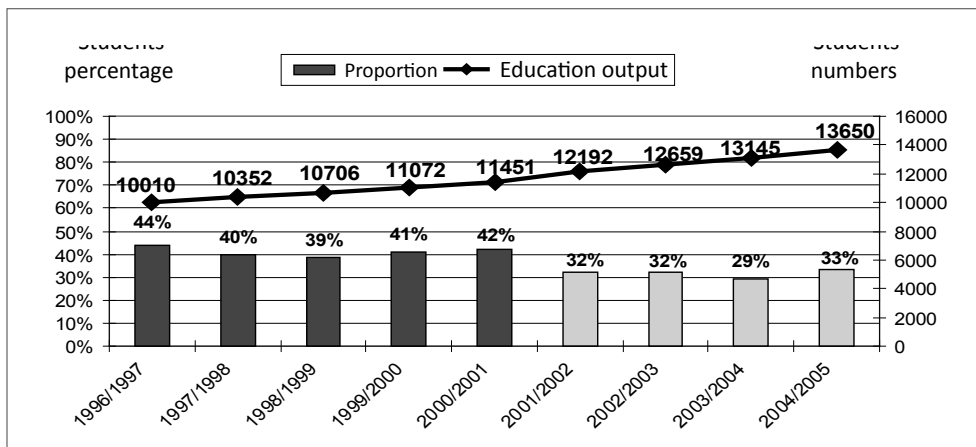


Table 2: Numbers of students admitted to enter the University of Kuwait

1996/ 1997	1997/ 1998	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005
4406	4122	4147	4536	4841	3921	4045	3855	4559

The plan took into consideration the absorption capacity available in private universities and was presented to the government, through the scholarships system that came into force in the 2006/2007 academic year, and consisted of 1,205 students in the baccalaureate and diploma levels. The private universities financially contributed to this program by paying 20% of the tuition, by providing additional seats yearly for scholarships, and by enhancing their construction plan to absorb the number of applicants.

This program aims at addressing the problem the State of Kuwait faces in relation to opportunities for higher education as a result of the increase in the numbers of high school graduates. In addition, the costs of these students are low compared to that of using foreign universities or to the costs of establishing a new government university. The program aims also to meet the objective of establishing private universities to achieve community-based development through government support to university disciplines oriented toward the labour market and community service. It also aims to give students who satisfy the admission criteria the opportunity to choose between public education and private education; this has meant that all students have equal opportunities to make their choice, and refutes the idea that private education, because of its high cost, is monopolized by affluent students.

II. Private universities in Kuwait

1. Historical overview

In 1999, Royal Decree 56 /2000 allowed private universities to be established. A committee was established in October 1999 to prepare the decree's executive regulations (Ministerial Decree 99 /199) and this was followed by the Decree-Law 34/ 2000, issued in July 2000, for the establishment of private universities (Private Universities Council, 2006). The law gave the government six months to issue the executive regulations, but the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Youssef Al-Ibrahim, anticipated this by issuing the Decree 26 /2000 in May 2000 which established the executive office of the private universities and defining its prerogatives i.e., inter alia, following the development of the law's executive regulations.

It was necessary to strengthen the Private Universities Council's executive role, so the Council of Ministers issued the Decree 1179/ 2006 which added an article to the executive regulations defining the General Secretariat's task i.e. to implement the Private Universities Council's decisions, and gave the Secretariat and the Council special authority over their financial budget within the Higher Education Ministry's budget. It also authorized the Secretary General to have deputies to help carry out some of the responsibilities.

The next Minister of Education and Higher Education, Dr. Mousaed Al-Haroun, established the Private Universities Council (Council of Ministers' Resolution 359 /2001) to address private universities' issues according to rules stipulated by the law's executive regulations. The Council was presided over by the Minister of Higher Education, and contained members with experience and competence as stipulated in the regulations. The Council was re-established by the Council of Minister's Resolution 428 /2004. The Council of Ministers' Resolution 411 /2007 renewed the Council's establishment with the same members. Since then, the Council has given twelve licenses for private educational institutions through Princely Decrees. The first private university was opened in September 2003 and the first college in September 2004. Today, private education institutes educate more than 12,000 students in institutions that have obtained academic accreditations at national and international levels.

2. Private universities activities in Kuwait

Private universities in Kuwait include various types of licenses. There are universities operating on the baccalaureate and postgraduate levels like the Gulf University for Sciences and Technology, the American University of Kuwait, the Arab Open University, and the Middle East American University. There are faculties working at the diploma level such as the Middle East American College, and the Boxhill College for Girls. There are also educational institutions that offer programs at diploma and

baccalaureate levels for students who have finished the diploma program, such as the Australian College in Kuwait. The current licenses encompass disciplines such as the sciences, humanities, business administration, medicine, medical assistance, and engineering. Table 3 shows the licensed private universities and colleges in Kuwait and the licensed disciplines.

Private universities in Kuwait started to receive students from 2003 with the opening of The Gulf University for Sciences and Technology and The Arab Open University. Today, there are eight functioning higher education institutions and four licensed institutions under planning and construction. Table 4 shows private universities and colleges enrolled students by nationality. Table 5 shows enrolled students by gender.

Table 3: Licensed universities and colleges in Kuwait and their programs of study

University/college	Degrees and disciplines granted
1. Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	Bachelor degree in English Language, Administrative Sciences, Computer Sciences, Master's in Business Administration
2. American University in Kuwait	Bachelor degree in Engineering Sciences, Business Administration, Humanities and Sciences.
3. Australian College in Kuwait	Diploma degree in Marine Sciences, Applied Engineering, Management. Bachelor degree in Management, and Applied Engineering.
4. Kuwait-Maastricht Business Administration School	Master's degree in Business Administration
5. Middle East American College	Diploma degree in Information Technology, Nursing, Business Administration, Hospitality Management, Hostelry, and Engineering Techniques.
6. Boxhill College for girls	Diploma degree in Business Administration, Art Design and Construction Techniques, Information Systems, Libraries, Applied Sciences.
7. Arab Open University (Headquarters Agreement)	Bachelor degree in English Literature, Computer Sciences, Business Administration.
8. Kuwait Technical College	Diploma degree in Business Administration and Information Systems and Technology
9. Middle East American University	Bachelor degree in Engineering Sciences, Business Administration, Health Sciences, Hotel and Hospitality Management, Social Sciences, Information Technology, Computer Sciences, Medicine, University Hospital, Master's in Business Administration and Health Sciences.
10. Aviation Technology College	Diploma degree in Aviation Engineering and Technology
11. Kuwait Institute for Sciences and Technology	Bachelor degree in Computer Sciences, Information Engineering and Technology, and Communication Technology.
12. Law Kuwaiti Universal College	Diploma in law – BA in Law – Master in Law

Table 4: Students enrolled in private educational institutions by nationality 2008 /2009

University / College	Kuwaiti		Non- Kuwaiti		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
Arab Open University – Kuwait branch	2,005	40%	2,970	60%	4,975
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	2,109	85%	366	15%	2,475
Kuwait-Maastricht Business Administration School	211	68%	99	32%	310
American University of Kuwait	1,431	73%	518	27%	1,949
Australian College of Kuwait	1,742	81%	404	19%	2,146
Boxhill College for girls - Kuwait	314	90%	35	10%	349
Middle East American University	257	87%	37	13%	294
Middle East American College	250	95%	12	5%	264
TOTAL	8,319	65%	4,441	35%	12,762

Table 5: Students enrolled in private educational institutions by gender 2008/ 2009

University/College	Males	%	Females	%	Total
Arab Open University – Kuwait branch	1,941	39%	3,034	61%	4,975
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	1,189	48%	1,286	52%	2,475
Kuwait-Maastricht Business Administration School	194	63%	116	37%	310
American University of Kuwait	921	47%	1,028	53%	1,949
Australian College of Kuwait	1,182	55%	964	45%	2,146
Boxhill College for girls - Kuwait	0	0	349	100%	349
Middle East American University	146	50%	148	50%	294
Middle East American College	136	52%	126	48%	264
TOTAL	5,709	45%	7,051	55%	12,762



III. The functions of the Public Universities Council

1. Form of management and governance

The Council is an administrative body for control and governance (Governance body). It aims at ensuring global excellence in Higher Education Institutions. In order to meet this goal, the Council regulates the private higher education's market and activities. To meet its goals, the Council uses a specifications system, an evaluation and accreditation system, a scholarships system and a research and development system. The Council's specialized committees are responsible for these systems and the systems operate in a parallel and overlapping manner. For example, the implementation of the specifications system requires the activation of the evaluation and accreditation system during the licensing process, through consultations held between the applications committee and the accreditation committee during the application evaluation. When looking at the admission policy and the scholarships system, the Council needs to be assured that the qualifications of admitted students meet the university's objectives. Also the licensing system needs to be referred to in order to check the names of the degrees and the licensed programs. The Council also needs to check the financial position of the institution along with its capacity to absorb the expected numbers. All this realizes the goal of organizing the market of inputting students.

In this respect, the Council's system is similar to the other State regulatory body systems, such as the Kuwait Central Bank in its supervision of the monetary system and the banks; the Public Authority for Industry in its supervision of industrial activity; and the Credentials Market Commission in its supervision of licenses for market inclusion, trading organization, supervision of registered companies activity according to each system's law. This model or work system is in compliance with the provisions of Law 34/ 2000 and its executive regulations. The Princely Decrees concerning the private educational institutions stipulate that the universities are under the supervision of the Private Universities Council in all the provisions of laws and its executive regulations, and the provisions of the decree licensing these universities. This confirms the legislator aim to provide an integrated control body. In addition, the Council implements the principles relating to Public Private Partnership. The effectiveness of this was seen in the activities of accreditation, scholarships (both external and local) paid in part by the educational institutions attest to the effectiveness of this. The Public Private Partnership can be regarded as a solution to many of the problems facing large scale higher education provision (Charafeddine, 2006).

2. Achievements of the Private Universities Council and its General Secretariat

In this part, it is appropriate to summarize some of the achievements of the Council which have reassured the supervisory body and the government and led it to embark on the scholarships programs. We will limit ourselves to the most important projects or programs:

- a. Licensing system and applications reviews started in the executive office in 2000 and it was ratified by the Council in the first session and implemented in 2001. Accordingly, 12 Private Higher Education Institutes were licensed. The Gulf University for Sciences and Technology was opened in 2003. In 2004, the Australian College in Kuwait and the American University of Kuwait were opened. The Boxhill College for Girls began operation in the 2007/ 2008 academic year. During the 2008/ 2009 academic year, the Middle East American College and the Middle East American University began operation. The courses are expected to begin in the remaining colleges - the Kuwaiti Technical College, the



Aviation Technology College, the Kuwaiti Institute for Sciences and Technology, and the Kuwait International Law College - upon completion of their construction.

- b. Quality assurance system and institutional and programs accreditations started in the accreditation committee in 2002, was completed in 2003, and was ratified in the Council. Five educational institutions have been accredited and others will be accredited during the second session. Many private educational institutions have obtained international accreditations for their programs. The Private Universities Council became a full member in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in 2006, and an associate member in the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) in 2008; it also became a full member in the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) in 2009. In addition, the Private Universities Council is registered as an Accrediting Agency in the register of the American Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The private universities' success in the realization of institutional accreditation reassured the Council of the quality of the universities, and in their ability to provide high levels of education in-line with the needs of society and encouraged it to embark on the scholarships programs. (Alatqi and Al-Harbi, 2009).
- c. The internal scholarship system started in 2004, was ratified in the Council and its budget adopted in 2006 /2007 with 1,086 scholarships for Bachelors and Diploma programs being granted. 1,250 scholarships were offered in 2007/ 2008 and 1,750 in 2008/ 2009. The Ministry of Finance covered the surplus numbers stemming from these scholarships, as will be explained later.
- d. The Research and Development system started in 2005 and was ratified by the Council in 2006. Its first program, the professional development program using the 6th sigma methodology, was implemented in 2008/ 2009. Also, extensive research was conducted at the university level with the encouragement of the Private Universities Council.

3. The global assessment of the private universities system in Kuwait

- a. The private universities acquisition of international academic accreditation in record time is a notable feature of the private university system in Kuwait. The Arab Open University has obtained the accreditation of the Open University Validation Services (OUVS), the Maastricht Business Administration School was accredited by the Association of MBAs (AMBA), and the Australian College was recognized by the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).
- b. The Observatory for Higher Education has considered the licensing and accreditation system in Kuwait as moderately liberal.
- c. The Secretary General presented the activities of the Council and private universities to a UNESCO seminar on Higher Education, held in Rabat (Morocco) in May 2007 (Alatqi and El-Azma, 2007). At the end of the seminar, the scientific committee of UNESCO experts adopted a recommendation that the private university system in Kuwait should be seen as an example to other Arab states, and that the vitality of these universities and their ability to continue operating in the long term make the system suitable for replication.
- d. Through the efforts of the Private University Council General Secretary, the State of Kuwait became the only Arab State to participate in the OECD feasibility study on the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcome (AHELO).



IV. The program of external and local scholarships in Private Universities Council

Law 34 /2000 which established private universities stipulated in its second article: “The aims of private universities are to contribute to the fulfilment of Higher Education and the applied education goals, in order to realize the coordination between these objectives and the evolving needs of society.” The law’s explanatory note stated that the law was passed to address the issue of the limited number of places at the University of Kuwait which was, therefore, unable to accommodate the increasing numbers of the high school graduates who wished to pursue university studies.

Articles 3 and 6 of the law’s executive regulations concern the Private Universities Council’s competence related to the establishment of rules and procedures for students’ admission to private educational institutions, tuition fees, and the scholarships system. The law’s provisions and executive regulations filled the legislative gap in the Ministry of Higher Education’s decree which limits its authority to scholarships outside Kuwait only.

Accordingly, the Private Universities Council issued its decision concerning the local scholarships’ policy and its plan in its 24th meeting held in March 2006. This was in light of a study prepared for this purpose to meet the goals of the law in which the private educational institutions were to pay 20% of the tuition fees.

1. External and local Scholarships in the light of the state’s budget:

It should be noted that the state’s budget has more than doubled during the last five years while, during the same period, the number of seats available for the students admitted yearly in the University of Kuwait and in the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training combined has increased by no more than 25%. This constitutes a major threat to the national workforce meeting labour market needs, to the state’s budget and to development in general. This has prompted the government to give priority to student scholarships in its educational program for the new academic year and to provide an appropriate budget for it.

The scholarships program allows the state to save 50% each year on the alternative costs of funding additional governmental educational institutions or foreign scholarships. In light of the delay in the taking over the University of Kuwait’s new headquarters in Al-Chadadiyah, planned for 2014, the scholarships program seems to be the only available cost-effective solution to absorb high school graduates.

2. Local scholarships and social objectives:

The scholarships program fulfils core social objectives regarding the homogeneity of society and helping to combat the phenomenon of education for only the elite. The long-term stability of the state depends on reducing social class disparities and promoting cohesion and social justice by providing equal opportunities to experience excellence in education.

This program promotes justice and provides students with the freedom to choose disciplines oriented to the labour market and to those needed for development. It enables future generations to carry on with their studies, and this in turn, strengthens feelings of national belonging and brotherhood. This program has reduced pressure on the University of Kuwait and on the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, by absorbing 4,595 students in local scholarships. The Higher Education systems in many countries of the world have been criticized for the lack of equal opportunities in Higher Education provision, favouring affluent students at the expense



of students from lower-incomes. For example, Ali Al-Hawat (2007) says that HEIs are facing a funding crisis manifested, inter alia, in the lower-income students' incapacity to participate in the available learning opportunities. Al-Hawat suggests ways to support education like the Public Private Partnership in financing students' tuitions fees.

3. Admission development to local scholarships

The Private Universities Council began accepting applications for local scholarships in the first 2006/ 2007 academic semester. Table 6 shows available places and the number of applicants and admitted students to scholarships. Table 7 (a-f) shows the evolution of admission scholarships by categories and educational institutions participating in this program. These tables show the private universities' applicants and the growth of admitted students for three consecutive years at a rate of not less than 15% annually. The University of Kuwait itself has increased its number of places in comparison with its aforementioned plan, and now takes in more than 6,000 students annually. Nevertheless, private universities are clear popular with students whose grades enable them to enter the University of Kuwait and this enhances the private universities' competitiveness capacity amid equal learning opportunities.

Table 6: Number of applicants admitted to local scholarships versus available seats

School year	Available seats	Total number of applicants	Total number of admitted applicants	Admitted %
2006 /2007	1,068	1,568	1,205	77%
2007 /2008	1,250	1,839	1,461	79%
2008 /2009	1,750	2,354	1,929	82%
TOTAL	4,068	5,761	4,495	78%

Table 7a: Number admitted to local scholarships for the first semester 2006 /2007

University / College	High-school certificate holders	Diploma certificate holders	Outstanding students	TOTAL
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	211	25	46	282
American University of Kuwait	202	25	25	252
Australian College in Kuwait	302	Not applicable	10	312
TOTAL	715	50	81	846

**Table 7b: Number admitted to local scholarships
for the second semester 2006/ 2007**

University / College	High-school certificate holders	Diploma certificate holders	Outstanding students	TOTAL
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	71	20	22	113
American University of Kuwait	70	13	17	100
Australian College in Kuwait	132	Not applicable	14	146
TOTAL	273	33	53	359

**Table 7c: Number admitted to local scholarships
for the first semester 2007 /2008**

University / College	High-school certificate holders	Diploma certificate holders	Outstanding students	TOTAL
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	296	36	46	378
American University of Kuwait	194	48	36	278
Australian College in Kuwait	324	12	25	361
Boxhill College for Girls	30	Not applicable	*	30
TOTAL	844	96	107	1,047

**Table 7d: Number admitted to external and local scholarships
for the second semester 2007/ 2008**

University / College	High-school certificate holders	Diploma certificate holders	Outstanding students	TOTAL
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	77	0	27	104
American University of Kuwait	63	23	25	111
Australian College in Kuwait	102	29	28	159
Boxhill College for Girls	40	Not applicable	Not applicable	40
TOTAL	282	52	80	414

**Table 7e: Number admitted to external and local scholarships
for the first semester 2008 /2009**

University / College	High-school	Diploma certificate holders	Outstanding students	Transferred	Sons of diplomats	Persons with special needs	Total
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	282	40	24	1	14	0	361
American University of Kuwait	172	44	19	1	8	0	244
Middle East American University	173	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	0	1	174
Australian College in Kuwait	132	26	39	0	6	1	204
Boxhill College for Girls	217	Not applicable	*	0	1	1	218
Middle East American College	242	Not applicable	*	*	1	0	244
TOTAL	1,218	110	82	2	30	3	1,445

**Table 7f: Number admitted to external and local scholarships
for the second semester 2008 /2009**

University / College	High-school	Diploma certificate holders	Outstanding students	Transferred	Sons of diplomats	Persons with special needs	Total
Gulf University for Sciences and Technology	104	18	22	0	0	2	146
American University of Kuwait	40	10	18	1	2	0	71
Australian College in Kuwait	79	30	49	0	0	2	91
Boxhill College for Girls	89	Not applicable	Not applicable	0	0	2	91
Total	330	58	89	1	1	4	484



V. Conclusion

The private universities' law in Kuwait was passed to meet the increase in demand for higher and applied education seats, in the light of the limited number of seats available in governmental institutions. Private educational institutions started operating in 2003 and obtained academic accreditations and global quality assurance certificates. This allowed officials to start thinking about a local scholarship system in Kuwait in order to diversify higher and applied education sources. In addition, it provided equal opportunities for students qualified to enrol in HEIs, and encouraged choice to compete for free education services provision in private universities, governmental education and other forms of private education.

The three years during which local scholarships were applied have shown that the demand for them has exceeded the designed plan by a rate of not less than 15% annually. However, an average of 20% of students who applied were not admitted. Accordingly, we can say that the surplus in demand compared to the supply in scholarships' places reached an average of 20%. This reflects the acceptance of private universities and colleges by Kuwaiti society. This program has given unique educational opportunities to students who do not wish to study abroad, but wanted an educational environment and educational programs similar to high quality universities and colleges in developed countries.

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