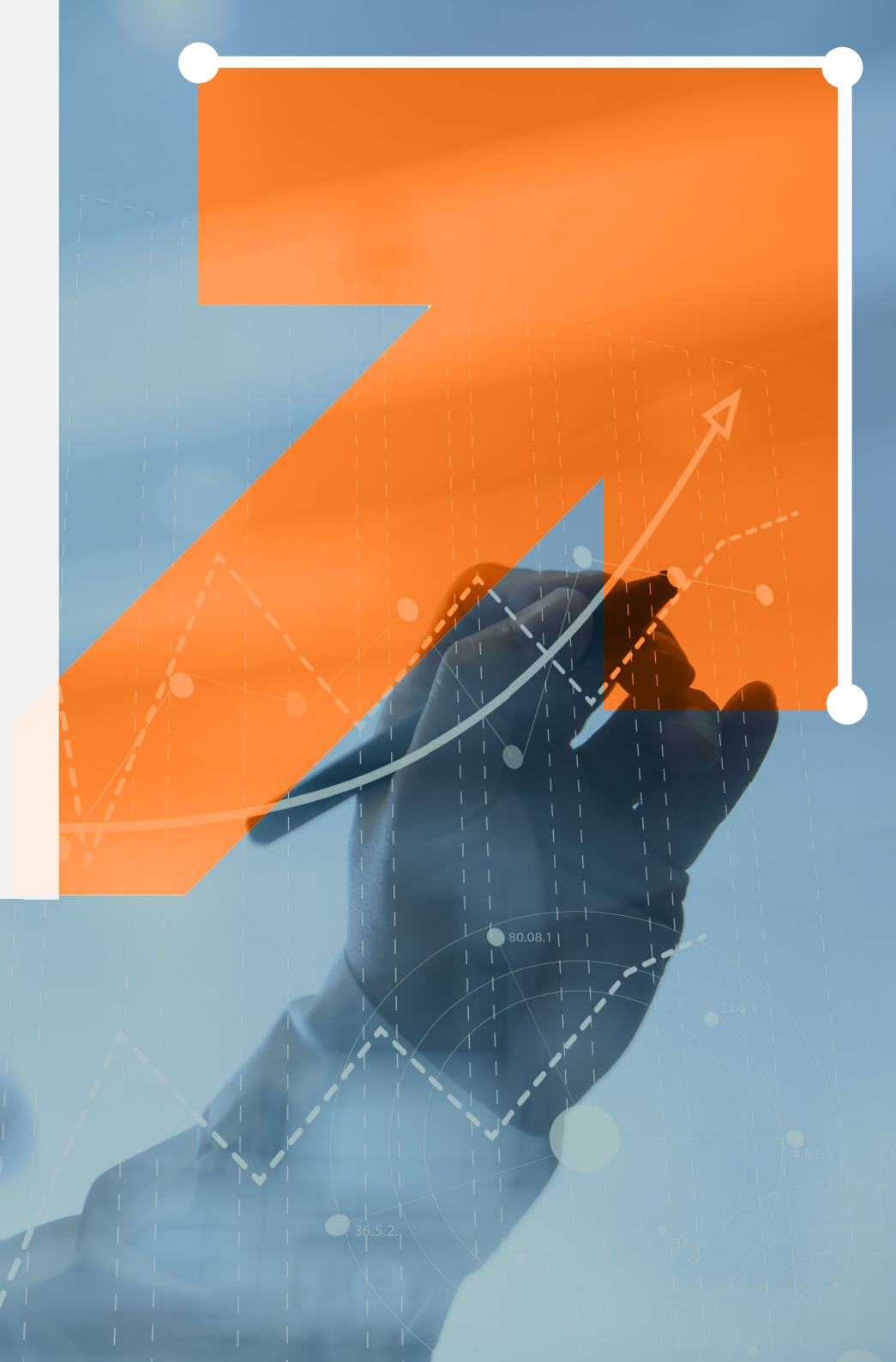


STRATEGY ASCEND 2030

From Difference to Distinction





A Note from Our Chairman

Dr. Sa'ad Al Omari

It gives me great pride to introduce ASCEND 2030, our new strategic roadmap guided by the motto 'From Difference to Distinction.' This roadmap invites our students, faculty, and community to join us on a journey of growth and innovation, building a university that inspires, impacts, and leads.

From the very beginning, our mission has been to graduate capable lifelong learners and engaged professionals who can contribute meaningfully to Kuwait's socioeconomic advancement.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, AU is committed to preparing graduates who are globally competent, socially responsible, and industry ready.



Our journey so far has provided valuable lessons that shape the way we move forward. We have been resilient in times of challenge, harnessed the power of collaboration, and aligned education with real-world needs. Building on these experiences, we have crafted a new mission and vision for the University. This strategy represents nine months of careful consultation, reflection, and feedback gathered from across the University, ensuring that the perspectives of our faculty, staff, and stakeholders have been fully incorporated.



In developing ASCEND 2030, we carefully considered the complexities of today's rapidly evolving world. Our goals are designed to absorb these challenges and turn them into opportunities, ensuring that the University remains agile, resilient, and forward-looking. Central to this strategy is our commitment to harness the power of knowledge, combined with discovery, to drive our students' success. At the same time, we are redefining our ways of working to maximize operational efficiency and foster engagement across community.

We recognize that a strong future requires strong partnerships. That is why we continue to expand collaborations with industry, government, and international academic institutions. These alliances will enable us to deliver programs that match labor market needs, advance innovation, and create opportunities for joint research and mobility. At the same time, we are prioritizing the recruitment of experienced faculty and the attraction of talented students who share our ambition to transform ideas into impact. By aligning our strategic priorities with national and global trends, we are building a future-ready institution that contributes directly to Kuwait's sustainable development and global competitiveness.

During the years, AU has evolved and adapted to its changing environment, continuing to improve year after year. I am proud of how this strategy has turned out, and I am excited to see where it will lead us. I look forward to sharing the rest of this journey with all of you.



Message from the President

Prof. Isam Zabalawi

A strategy is more than a plan—it is a roadmap that guides our decisions, aligns our resources, and ensures that every effort contributes to our shared vision. Our previous initiatives have strengthened academic programs, advanced research, enhanced student facilities, and fostered collaborations with industry and the community. These accomplishments demonstrate the value of having a clear strategy and the impact it has on our students, faculty, staff, and wider stakeholders. We are grateful to all who have contributed their insights and feedback to shape this plan.

Over the last five years, AU has implemented a strategic framework that guided the University through a period of significant growth and transformation. The previous strategy of 2021-2025 'Excellence in Making a Difference' emphasized on academic excellence by expanding the academic programs, research capabilities, student facilities, infrastructure and collaborating with the industry. We can proudly state that AU has achieved the majority of its goals and objectives.

In 2022, following extensive efforts by AU's leadership and stakeholders, we achieved a landmark milestone. The College was granted University status and officially transitioned from 'Australian College of Kuwait' to 'Australian University.' This long-standing goal marked a pivotal moment in the University's evolution. In line with the transition, an important aspect of the previous strategy was 'Fostering the AU brand.' To support and promote the new identity, a rebranding initiative was launched, encompassing all campus facilities and digital platforms, in conjunction with a nation-wide campaign. This transformation strengthened AU's position in a competitive market by enhancing its credibility and reputation as a leading university committed to excellence and continuous progress.

The following charts provide a summary of our achievements against the goals set in our previous strategic plan. They highlight the progress we have made across academics, research, community engagement, and infrastructure.

Message from the President

01 Growth & Sustainability 81%



Goal 1.1
Grow program offering, student intake, and infrastructure

78%



Goal 1.2
Promote a sustainable environment for AU

84%

02 Excellence in Teaching & Learning 76%



Goal 2.1
An Innovative Student-Centered Approach to Teaching & Learning

79%



Goal 2.2
Support Lifelong Learning

73%

03 Research: Innovation & Impact 70%



Goal 3.1
Foster an Ecosystem that leads to Knowledge Creation & Research

65%



Goal 3.2
Develop Knowledge Exchange Pathways

75%

04 Inclusion, Wellbeing & Engagement 68%



Goal 4.1
Unlock Human Potential

60%



Goal 4.2
Nurture a Holistic Student Experience

77%

Message from the President

*It is now time we move from **making a difference to achieving distinction**. Thus, we introduce to you, our new strategy- ASCEND. The implementation of this strategy will be monitored annually, allowing us to adapt and remain responsive to change. I invite each one of you to join us in bringing this vision to life as we ascend together on this journey. Together, we will shape a future that reflects the best of who we are and what we can achieve.*

Message from the President

WHY ASCEND?

The AU 2021-2025 Strategic Plan is built on its success to sustain quality education, research and services. AU has created the new strategic plan "ASCEND" to present areas of focus and overarching goals to work towards for the next five years, implying a strategic journey from a solid foundation toward higher goals. The previous strategy of 'Excellence in Making a Difference' has achieved great milestones, the new strategy ASCEND reaffirms our commitment to move onwards and upwards.

AS WE LOOK AHEAD, OUR STRATEGY IS GUIDED BY A NEW **MOTTO**

FROM DIFFERENCE TO DISTINCTION

Aiming to elevate the University to local and regional prominence. As we ascend from difference to distinction, the University will be recognized for excellence in education, research, and community impact, all while aspiring to rank among leading institutions in the Arab world.



Message from the President

Ascend responds to national and global trends in higher education and rapid technological advancements, with a strong emphasis on equity, well-being, employability, quality assurance, and long-term sustainability. AU has defined three major strategic pillars: Knowledge with Impact, Discovery, and New Ways of Working.

- **Knowledge with Impact** reflects AU's commitment to delivering education that is relevant, applicable, and transformative empowering graduates and contributing to societal advancement.
- **Discovery** emphasizes fostering a culture of curiosity, innovation, and interdisciplinary research that addresses complex real-world challenges.
- **New Ways of Working** responds to the evolving nature of work and learning through digital transformation, collaborative practices and talent management while fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for the AU community.

Together, these pillars form the foundation of ASCEND, ensuring AU remains resilient, relevant, and future-ready in an increasingly dynamic academic and professional environment. This strategic framework serves as a guide for decision-making, resource allocation, and functional planning across all departments.

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on the past experiences of five years, we draw the following 10 key lessons:

- 01** While AU has successfully launched several new academic offerings, additional efforts are required to expand industry-relevant graduate programs and introduce postgraduate programs.
- 02** Sustainability is no longer seen as an optional initiative but as a core part of university strategy. This requires embedding sustainability principles into the student curriculum, community engagement initiatives, resource management practices, faculty research and innovation initiatives.
- 03** In a rapidly evolving academic and professional landscape driven by AI, university must prioritize upskilling for both students and faculty through various talent management strategies to ensure they remain relevant, agile and proactive to navigate future challenges.
- 04** Long-term growth in higher education relies not only on academic quality but also on the continuous development of infrastructure, laboratories, student spaces, and administrative facilities. Investing in these areas is essential to enhance the learning environment, support service delivery, and meet the evolving needs of students and staff.
- 05** Research empowers students to develop critical thinking and a deeper understanding of their field. To enhance student participation in research, AU should develop structured opportunities that enable students to explore diverse research pathways, thereby fostering a stronger and more inclusive research culture across the university.



- 06** Expanding postgraduate partnerships, alumni engagement initiatives, and resource availability can further strengthen AU's lifelong learning ecosystem and elevate alumni satisfaction and employability outcomes.
- 07** With the ongoing digitalization of university processes driven by technological advancements, digital infrastructure has become foundational. AU must invest continuously in robust, scalable, and accessible digital platforms. Moreover, passive online teaching is not enough; universities need to use interactive digital tools that help build a sense of community and keep students engaged for better learning.
- 08** Industry collaboration has enabled students to gain valuable real-world experience and expand their professional networks. The University should actively pursue the development of various partnerships with industry and government organizations. By facilitating practical learning experiences and organizing joint forums and workshops, AU can significantly improve graduate employability.
- 09** To enhance student success and well-being, we recognize the proven impact of support services such as counseling and academic advising. We aspire to expand and diversify our student support ecosystem through enhancing academic tutoring, offering career development programs, and fostering an inclusive campus environment that supports both personal growth and academic achievement.
- 10** Lastly, a university strategy helps focus efforts, set clear priorities, and make better decisions to achieve long-term goals. There should be a clear and more focused sense of direction in the university strategy planning. Moving forward, the university adopts more agile strategies that prioritize a few high-impact priorities enabling clearer alignment, better resource allocation, and more measurable outcomes.

Strategic Risk

Prior to the development of the new University Strategy, a comprehensive risk assessment was undertaken to identify potential strategic risks and establish corresponding mitigation measures. This exercise was designed to ensure that the strategy would be resilient, adaptable, and aligned with both internal priorities and external trends. The assessment leveraged a wide range of evidence and data. These data sources allowed the University to evaluate areas of strength, detect vulnerabilities, and anticipate challenges that could affect academic quality, research impact, operational efficiency, student engagement, and overall institutional reputation. The risk assessment also incorporated insights from global higher education trends and reports from leading professional services firms, including Deloitte and EY.

To ensure a robust and evidence-based approach, senior management conducted a series of structured exercises. These exercises included a review of the previous strategy, benchmarking against peer institutions, analysis of institutional KPIs, stakeholder consultations with academic and administrative departments, and extensive risk mapping. Each stage contributed critical insights into potential risks, their likelihood, and impact, while identifying actionable mitigation measures. As part of this process, a separate Risk Assessment document was created, serving as a dedicated tool for monitoring and managing strategic risks. It ensures that the University can systematically monitor risk exposure, respond promptly to emerging threats, and maintain a high level of preparedness, thereby supporting the effective and successful implementation of the new strategy.



Purpose

Our Purpose is to embrace the transformative impact of education and discovery while keeping our students at the heart of what we do.



Aspirations

- **Ascend** and become a leading university in Kuwait and the region invested in the success of our AU learners, educators and wider community
- **Advance** the University and the nation through our knowledge and discovery
- **Commit** to respectful ways of working together
- **Empower** the next generation of AU learners with knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in life



Priorities

ies





Align our activities with Kuwait 2035 Vision



Drive Decisions with Data Governance & Business Intelligence Tools



Integrate our activities with the Sustainable Development Goals to drive positive impact and shared responsibility



Ensure our graduates are highly employable



Advance Research Based Learning as AU's Signature



Embed authentic, applied and transformative learning into our pedagogy



Create a Higher Education Leadership Academy with a local and regional outreach



Grow & expand our programs of study



Engage our students in research opportunities



Lead with trust and accountability



Create an environment that rewards and enriches outstanding educators, researchers, and students



Support our students to craft a career with purpose



Foster an environment that cultivates institutional effectiveness



Provide lifelong learning opportunities for our educators and students



Advance high quality research that tackles real-world challenges



Develop our precincts and campus



Strengthen our local and regional partnerships



Intensify our commitment to providing an exceptional student-experience



Maintain and grow our alumni relationships



Harness the transformable impact of digital transformation and data analytics

Core Values and Guiding Principles:



We are **Ambitious** in our Pursuit of **Excellence**.

Our ambition drives the highest standards in teaching, research and service, turning learning and discovery into lasting impact.



We Act with **Integrity**, Guided by **Ethics**.

We uphold honesty, transparency, and accountability in all actions, ensuring ethical conduct throughout the university.



Through **Collaboration**, we Create **Community**.

We foster a spirit of cooperation across disciplines, departments, and communities.



We **Empower** Individuals to Actively **Engage**.

Empowerment at our university means fostering individuality, providing the tools and platforms to turn ideas into action encouraging active engagement and celebrating achievements along the way.



Our **Responsible** Practices Ensures a **Sustainable** Tomorrow.

This reflects our commitment to collective responsibility towards the community through sustainable actions and practices.



We Embrace **Inclusiveness** that Transforms **Diversity** into Opportunity.

Our campus celebrates diversity and encourages collaboration, creating a welcoming inclusive environment for all students, staff, and faculty.

Direction

Knowledge
with Impact

Discovery

New Ways
of Working



Pillar 1

Knowledge with Impact

✓ Goal 1.1: Diversify Academic Portfolio

Goal 1.1 Objectives

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Objective 1 | Develop and launch new bachelors and master's degree programs aligned with emerging disciplines and student interests. |
| Objective 2 | Expand the institution's global footprint through accreditations, rankings, and international recognitions. |

✓ Goal 1.2: Redesign Learning for a Changing World

Goal 1.2 Objectives

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Objective 1 | Integrate project-based learning, sustainability, and digital literacy across curricula to cultivate globally competent graduates. |
| Objective 2 | Expand access to micro credentials, industry-aligned certifications, and interdisciplinary electives. |

✓ Goal 1.3: Bridge Academia and Industry

Goal 1.3 Objectives

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Objective 1 | Cultivate strong industry partnerships to create an experiential learning ecosystem. |
| Objective 2 | Co-design programs with employers and alumni to ensure academic offerings align with the emerging needs of the future workforce. |



Pillar 2

Discovery

✓ Goal 2.1: Promote Excellence in Faculty Research

Goal 2.1 Objectives

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Objective 1 | Strengthen faculty research capacity through targeted funding, international collaborations, promotion of multidisciplinary research and investing in a digitalized central research support system. |
| Objective 2 | Enable faculty to secure competitive research grants that drive high-impact, innovative projects aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national priorities. |

✓ Goal 2.2: Cultivate a Culture of Research and Innovation Among Students

Goal 2.2 Objectives

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Objective 1 | Embed research-based learning through academic coursework and student participation in faculty-led research projects. |
| Objective 2 | Modernize learning spaces, laboratories, centers, and library resources, integrating immersive technologies to support innovative teaching, research, and hands-on experiential learning. |

✓ Goal 2.3: Foster a Spirit of Learning Beyond the Classroom

Goal 2.3 Objectives

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Objective 1 | Enhance student engagement and campus life by offering diverse extracurricular activities, student clubs, sports and social events. |
| Objective 2 | Create dynamic opportunities for students to build core competencies through community outreach, innovation challenges, leadership programs and skills-based workshops. |



Pillar 3

New Ways of Working

✓ Goal 3.1: Build a Future-Ready Workforce

Goal 3.1 Objectives

- Objective 1** Recruit and retain high-performing faculty, researchers and staff through robust talent management strategies and career pathways.
- Objective 2** Foster a culture of continuous professional development by implementing personalized upskilling pathways for university employees, with a focus on AI literacy, data fluency, cybersecurity awareness, and emerging educational technologies.

✓ Goal 3.2: Optimize University Operations and Decision-Making

Goal 3.2 Objectives

- Objective 1** Design end-to-end digital service pathways (e.g., admissions, advising, onboarding, and internal services) that are personalized, proactive, and mobile-first.
- Objective 2** Seamlessly integrate annual planning, budgeting, and data governance using Enterprise Resource Planning systems to ensure effective management of resources including funds, manpower, and digital assets while enhancing cybersecurity and enabling informed decision-making.

✓ Goal 3.3: Redesign Infrastructure for Agility and Engagement

Goal 3.3 Objectives

- Objective 1** Invest in sustainable infrastructure and smart campus technologies to promote environmental responsibility and operational efficiency.
- Objective 2** Reimagine office, student and recreational spaces to curate a more inclusive environment that promotes engagement, well-being, and community life.



A better place to learn, and a place to learn better.

Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

This university strategy is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in areas of quality education, decent work and economic growth, and industry innovation. The strategy emphasizes adaptive, inclusive, and purpose-driven learning that equips students with real-world skills, digital literacy, and global competencies.

AU Goals	Key Focus	Aligned SDGs
1.1 Diversify Academic Portfolio	New academic programs, international recognition, accreditation	SDG 4, SDG 17
1.2 Redesign Learning for a Changing World	PBL, digital literacy, sustainability, micro-credentials, electives	SDG 4, SDG 9
1.3 Bridge Academia and Society	Industry collaborations, employability, co-designed programs	SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 17
2.1 Promote Excellence in Faculty Research	Research funding, multidisciplinary, SDG-aligned projects, digital research systems	SDG 9, SDG 17
2.2 Cultivate Student Research & Innovation Culture	Research-based learning, modern labs and spaces	SDG 4, SDG 9, SDG 11
2.3 Foster Learning Beyond the Classroom	Extracurricular, student clubs & sports, community outreach, competitions, leadership programs	SDG 4, SDG 10, SDG 3
3.1 Build a Future-Ready Workforce	Talent management, professional development, AI and data literacy	SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 9
3.2 Optimize University Operations & Decision-Making	Digital services, cybersecurity, data governance, budgeting	SDG 9, SDG 12, SDG 16
3.3 Redesign Infrastructure for Agility & Engagement	Sustainable infrastructure, smart campus, recreational spaces, engagement	SDG 11, SDG 9, SDG 12, SDG 13





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