



**Awards
MENA 2023**

The winners

#THEAwardsMENA

Introduction



We are delighted to bring the “Oscars of higher education” to the Middle East and North Africa for the first time.

Times Higher Education is proud to have played an integral role in recognising, supporting and incentivising excellence in global higher education and research since our foundation in 1971. One of the ways we do this is through our prestigious *THE Awards*, which spotlight the truly exceptional achievements of universities, teams and individuals in some of their most critical areas of focus, holding them up as beacons of best practice.

The *THE Awards* have been a major part of the university landscape in the UK for almost 20 years, and for several years we recognised much of the MENA region as part of our *THE Awards Asia*. But it is inescapably clear that the area deserves its own showcase, and thus its own, dedicated annual awards.

So this year represents a landmark moment for *THE*: our first Awards focused exclusively on this vibrant, rapidly changing and ambitious part of the world.

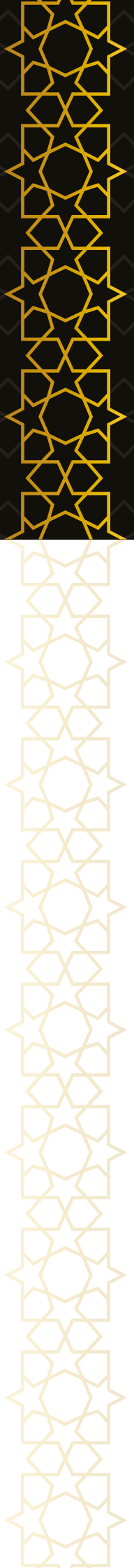
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Baty".

Phil Baty, chief global affairs officer
Times Higher Education

The scale, diversity and quality of the entries we received clearly justifies our decision to single out the region for special attention. Of nearly 270 entries from 13 countries or territories, our judges whittled down an inspirational set of submissions into 75 finalists and, ultimately, the 10 worthy winners you can read about in these pages.

This year is just the beginning. We hope that by giving these inaugural award winners their own space to shine, we will help not only to celebrate and showcase the good practice developed in the region, but also to spread it to neighbouring areas and beyond. We very much expect these awards to provide the case studies to inspire action in others and to help further supercharge one of the most exciting and innovative regions in global higher education.

We are delighted to play our part in celebrating your excellence.



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Leadership and Management Team of the Year

Lebanese American University
Lebanon

A clear commitment to promoting gender equality – not just inside the institution but across wider society – convinced the judges to award the Lebanese American University the prestigious title of Leadership and Management Team of the Year.

In a tightly contested category, LAU detailed and provided evidence of the impact of its work to advance women’s empowerment and gender equality nationally, regionally and globally, through research, education and outreach.

In March 2022, as part of its gender equality plan, LAU became the first organisation in Lebanon to grant 10 days of paternity leave – which employers are not required to provide under the national parental law – and to extend maternity leave from 10 weeks to 15, followed by flexible work arrangements for

both parents. The move was complemented by a wider public campaign to reform legislation on parental rights at the national level, taking in both public and private sector organisations. A national social media and TV advocacy campaign, backed by university research projects on the subject, reached close to 2.6 million people in Lebanon, more than a third of the total population.

The campaign included a contribution to a new draft parental law that is due to go before the Lebanese parliament.

Shining through the project was an impressive “sense of a university clear not just about its responsibility to its staff and students but also about its role in the wider world, with a commitment to making real social impact beyond its campus,” the judges said.



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International Strategy of the Year

Abu Dhabi University
United Arab Emirates

In truly international universities, global engagement runs through every aspect of the institution.

Abu Dhabi University is just such an institution, and its international strategy has been developed methodically and in consultation with senior leaders, faculty, students and advisory board members.

Among its innovations was the creation of an international office to plan, deliver and oversee international partnerships in a strategic way, expanding the university's formal engagement with prestigious, research-intensive universities while also opening up opportunities for student and faculty exchange.

The diversity of the academic body reflects this approach, with 40 nationalities represented among faculty and 93 among students.

Another notable innovation was the development of a Global Engagement Platform, bringing together 1,600 scholars from 90 countries to foster international research engagement and knowledge exchange.

With other activities including a global seminar series, alignment of ADU academic programmes with international certification standards, and partnerships with organisations such as the United Nations, ADU demonstrates a broad and impactful commitment to internationalisation that has enhanced its community, its outputs and its reputation.

"It is a strategy that has already delivered on key elements and is deserving of recognition. It stood out in a strong category on the basis of its breadth of ambition and activity," the judges said.

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Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership

University of Balamand
Lebanon

A project aimed at empowering young people to solve the world's most pressing water challenges landed the University of Balamand the award for Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership.

The One Million Action Postcards (1 MAP) initiative, introduced as part of the university's environmental engineering course, equips students with the knowledge and tools to conduct awareness sessions on water-related issues in schools for children aged four and up. Young pupils are encouraged to share their thoughts, ideas and plans about water challenges using specially designed postcards. Their completed postcards are then assembled to create a mosaic and added to a browsable database.

Between September and December 2022, University of Balamand students delivered 50 guest lectures to 3,000 students across 16 schools and universities, and they collected 3,000 postcards with insightful reflections and ideas for bold actions.

The initiative is now being expanded globally. In partnership with Wavemakers United, the university has submitted a commitment to the United Nations' Water Action Agenda to provide water education to a million young people every year until 2030. The project was promoted as a global endeavour at the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York, and also at New York Water Week 2023.

The judges noted the project's focus on empowering young people, who are particularly affected by water challenges, to assume an influential role in driving sustainable and innovative solutions.

They said the expansion of the initiative from a regional project to one that has gained significant international support and is making an impact globally in just six months was "very impressive".



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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Al-Ahliyya Amman University
Jordan

The Al-Ahliyya Amman University Hearing and Speech Center (AAU-HSC) was established to serve people in the local and regional community and to provide much-needed training opportunities and practical experience for the institution's audiology and speech students.

Through the centre, patients receive free services from experienced professionals in audiology and speech, who are conversant with best practice internationally and who use advanced, state-of-the-art equipment.

As a non-profit centre, AAU-HSC is easily accessible to many underprivileged patients with speech and language and/or hearing problems, including those with special needs. A multidisciplinary team helps to assess them and begin their rehabilitation process by providing them with tailored plans, under the supervision of distinguished experts and specialists licensed by Jordan's Ministry of Health.

In addition, AAU-HSC offers speech and language screening programmes in schools, and provides services to Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, its online diagnosis and treatment offerings allow the provision of services remotely throughout Jordan and abroad. The centre plans to expand its services by establishing a master's programme in speech and language pathology and audiology.

"The non-profit centre has made significant strides in helping its wider community through its free services in a vital health area, and should be commended for its screening programme in schools," the judges said.

Of all the entrants, they continued, AAU-HSC had made the most impact with its efforts to aid its wider community. The judges also praised its "bold" plans to raise the financing to open other branches in needy areas.



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Outstanding Support for Students

Gulf Medical University
United Arab Emirates

Keeping tabs on students' progress and offering them support to continue on their education pathways is vital in supporting academic advancement and can also help to promote diversity and inclusion within the campus community. A comprehensive platform to do just this impressed the judges, who awarded the Outstanding Support for Students prize to Gulf Medical University.

Designed to be user-friendly, the platform comprises digital support for student e-portfolios that is paired with a mentorship programme.

The e-portfolios enable students to showcase their coursework and achievements, encouraging goal-setting and self-reflection; when they share their portfolios with mentors, students receive personalised feedback and guidance, empowering them to evaluate their work, identify areas for improvement and ensure that they take significant ownership of their educational development.

Mentors have access to students' grades from the point of enrolment, allowing them to track progress and identify where they

are performing strongly and to flag areas of concern. Mentors can also access their mentees' self-assessment forms, so they can see if a student is facing personal, social or health-related issues that could be affecting their progress.

The expansive programme enabled by the platform helps the university to support students from a variety of backgrounds, which gives the campus an inclusive feel.

GMU conducts surveys and measures key performance indicators to assess the platform's impact. Student satisfaction rates are consistently high, approaching 93.5 per cent in the current academic year; students find their mentors to be highly accessible, and 93 per cent recommend them for future mentorship-related activity.

The judges described this project as "an outstanding example of a university developing a comprehensive support platform that encourages students to play a key role in setting their own goals and achieving their maximum potential". The "hugely impressive impact data" was also noted by the panel.

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Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

American University in Cairo
Egypt

A core function of a university is to produce original research that challenges assumptions, furthers understanding, advances knowledge and has an impact on people and their behaviours.

The “*Msh Zanbik*: It’s not your fault” project at the American University in Cairo exemplifies how a university can achieve big impact in a very important area that affects all of society, while demonstrating the unique power of the creative arts to reach people.

The “*Msh Zanbik*” project resulted in the first plays published in Egypt that dealt directly with sexual harassment. Readers have said the collection “breaks social taboos by offering dramatic texts that reflect the reality of survivors of sexual harassment from multiple perspectives – families and couples, bystanders, victims and perpetrators, men and women”.

The plays have been published royalty-free under a Creative Commons licence so that any community may perform them. The next stage of the project is the development of short educational videos, in Arabic and English, which the university will use as part of anti-harassment courses for new students. These will be the first Arabic videos that inform university students about the issue and contextualise the subject within the region’s culture.

The judges commented: “This is an inspiring demonstration of the agency of a university to contribute to such an important social topic, produce new, high-quality research and disseminate it to achieve strong impact. It also highlights the unique value of the arts as a framework to address a complex issue and make it accessible and understandable to many.”



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Research Project of the Year: STEM

New York University Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates

Much remains unknown about malaria infection despite its seriousness as a global health problem – there were 247 million cases and more than 600,000 deaths from malaria across 84 countries in 2021.

To tackle this challenge, researchers at New York University Abu Dhabi set off on a four-year search for effective therapeutic strategies and vaccines for malaria, specifically addressing parasite infections in the natural environment. They wanted to understand more about why some infected individuals developed severe disease while others did not.

Working with doctors and researchers in Burkina Faso, they undertook a field-based study into how African children from multiple ethnic groups living different lifestyles responded to malaria.

The researchers made two major discoveries: post-transcriptional regulation is a major

source of inter-individual variation in immune response to malaria; and infection-induced steroid molecules are associated with the severity of the disease and its outcome. They also discovered natural molecules present in diet that affect the immune response, opening the door for the development of complementary interventions that are accessible for low- and middle-income countries.

The judges noted the project's breadth of local partnerships and longitudinal timescale. "When we talk about collaborating to tackle global challenges, NYU Abu Dhabi's ambition and vision in the project is exemplary of how this can be achieved," they said.

"It's remarkable that this research has already had a significant impact on how we understand a deadly global disease and has led to funding for follow-up studies in Morocco and India."



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Student Recruitment Campaign of the Year

Qatar University
Qatar

By providing fun and practical activities for secondary school students, Qatar University's Engineer of the Future programme successfully encouraged a new generation of learners to enrol on courses at the institution.

Run as a week-long camp, the initiative sought to help boost the number of domestic students in the university's College of Engineering by offering entertaining and interactive hands-on experiments that took in many disciplines, including civil, structural and geotechnical engineering.

An important feature was the participation of graduates now working in industry who joined the daily activities and shared their experiences with young people. The Qatar Society of Engineers lent its support to the initiative by helping with the selection and invitation of alumni.

The programme was initially targeted at students in Qatar's National Service Academy,

in an effort to maximise the number of home students it reached.

Feedback from those who took part was extremely positive, and some students have indicated that without the initiative they would not have considered engineering as a career.

University records show that about 15 per cent of participants are now enrolled as engineering students at the institution, and more are expected to sign up in future recruitment rounds.

The success of the scheme has helped to attract significant funding from industry to facilitate future rounds of the programme, planning for which is already well under way.

"This innovative programme seeks to build the skilled workforce of the future for key areas of Qatar's economy, and is already showing signs of success," the judges said.



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Teaching and Learning Strategy of the Year

American University in Dubai
United Arab Emirates

A commitment to embedding both innovative teaching and entrepreneurship into degrees was central to the American University in Dubai's education strategy – a blueprint for learning that has been delivering impressive results.

Supported by the university's Center for Research, Innovation and Design, instructors have begun integrating virtual and augmented reality into classroom learning – with biology students now able to conduct experiments in a fully immersive VR laboratory course, or travel via a VR headset inside a human body or a cell to gain insights into complex biological concepts.

Undergraduates are increasingly taking the lead with their own learning and pushing the frontiers of digital technology. Working in partnership with academics and industry, AUD students were encouraged to design VR projects for local businesses, for which they won several cash prizes.

Students also applied their skills in artificial intelligence to tackle real-world problems faced by industry. One group of AUD mechanical engineering students was shortlisted as a top-five team by an Emirati aluminium manufacturer for the AI-driven robot it created, which can operate in high temperatures and inside strong magnetic fields.

With a keen sense of how innovation can address industry's major challenges, AUD students and graduates are now launching their own start-up businesses, deploying emerging technologies. Supported by the AUD Entrepreneurship and Innovation Center, more than 200 start-ups have been founded in the past five years, with spin-offs utilising metaverse spaces, gamification, augmented reality and blockchain to address the needs of industry.

The judges praised AUD for the “overall coherence of its vision, the excellent implementation of technology, and the clear, positive results achieved”.



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Technological or Digital Innovation of the Year

Arabian Gulf University
Bahrain

Arabian Gulf University looked to high-tech solutions to help with teaching female anatomy and obstetrics to male students and to make a wide range of clinical experiences more accessible.

The panel praised the “ingenious solution” to teaching female anatomy through the use of LucinaAR, a high-fidelity mannequin that incorporates augmented reality and Microsoft HoloLens headsets to see through the abdominal wall to the foetus in the womb. The technology overcomes gender bias, giving male students an insight to female anatomy that might be difficult to obtain otherwise.

The medical school also uses ray tracing technology to train students in a virtual hospital environment. Students are able to practise seeing patients, ordering tests, devising treatment plans and more. Government hospitals are not always accessible for

clinical rotations, and the simulated environment allows clear measurement of learning outcomes and offers training where immediate hands-on experience is not always available. The technology presents a broad range of different scenarios, creating solid groundwork for clinical practice.

Implementing a new computerised maintenance management system also improved the student experience, meeting all students’ needs in one place. This would be scalable to other medical schools, offering great efficiencies.

“Arabian Gulf University’s well-rounded approach to using technology to train medics is groundbreaking and could be applicable to other medical schools grappling with the same concerns across the region and further afield,” the judges said.



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