

## Jordan **BUSINESS**

### Her Majesty Queen Noor: Jubilee Girls Are Some Of Jordan's Top Achievers

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As founder and chairperson of the King Hussein Foundation, Her Majesty Queen Noor is involved with setting the strategic direction and providing guidance to ensure that the Jubilee School continues to excel among the premier educational institutions in the world. In this exclusive Q&A, she reveals her aspirations for the school, the Kingdom and for women in Jordan.

**Q: Your Majesty, where do you hope to see the Jubilee School another 20 years from now?**

A: The Jubilee School's unique mission has evolved over the past 25 years as it has served Jordan and the region as an innovative model for more equitable access to state-of-the-art education resources for meritorious students from diverse backgrounds. The school's philosophy and programs are grounded in Jordan's educational achievements and aspirations and at the same time open and connected to dynamic global networks and resources. This is consistent with the approach of all the programs and institutions of the King Hussein Foundation, from poverty eradication and women's empowerment, to family health and well-being, to arts and culture.

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My most fervent goal for the Jubilee School and Jubilee Institute has always been for its benefits to be further extended across Jordan and the region by expanding its scholarship and enhanced curriculum programs. Our holistic educational model includes comprehensive community service and leadership programs and rigorous electives that empower students, not only academically, but also to become responsible members of their communities and successful global citizens. King Hussein and I shared a dream that the school would serve Jordan well beyond its campus and individual enrolled students, in partnership with Jordan's Ministry of Education and public school system, through teacher training and curriculum development. There is certainly much more that we could do in these areas.

There is much change afoot at the Jubilee School today – we are transitioning Jubilee into an eco-school, which requires an overhaul of our infrastructure in order to create an institution that minimizes our negative impact on the environment. We are also developing high-tech IT infrastructure in order to make Jubilee a “smart” school, enhancing distance and online learning. In addition, the Jubilee Center for Excellence in Education is launching a rigorous new diploma program for teachers and principals that incorporates curricula and professors from some of the world’s top universities.

I am most proud of the increasing numbers of our graduates who are giving back to the school’s community with their time, energy and experience. Their ideas and insight are making an enormous difference in our efforts to ensure that the Jubilee School prepares as many promising young Jordanians as possible to contribute effectively to national development and progress and to represent the best of their Arab heritage, culture and talent as members of our global family.

Our educational model will continue to evolve over the coming decades while remaining true to our original core mission to provide equitable access to educational opportunities to as many students as possible. Some students, for example, learn better when paired together with their fellow classmates or while working in small groups; others flourish on their own. Similarly, some students’ knowledge and aptitude are not adequately reflected in standardized testing and require a flexible and multi-disciplinary approach to evaluation. We will continue to develop our understanding of the most successful ways to create more personalized, individual approaches to education in order to fully realize the potential of each student.

**Q: What methodologies from the Jubilee School do you think can be applied to improve the quality of education nationwide?**

A: There are so many elements of the Jubilee School that can be replicated across the country to highlight certain values or develop certain skills. Our research and development unit is focused on nurturing students’ creativity and inventiveness, as well as analytical thinking and investigative skills. Our project-based learning model encourages collaboration among students and encourages them to work with others and learn from their peers. Our testing model, unlike the ubiquitous standardized tests that only test on curriculum and encourage memorization rather than creative thinking, more accurately measures our students’ capabilities. Our tech and IT activities and courses equip students with practical skills in areas like biotechnology and ICT, preparing them for expanding employment opportunities in cutting-edge fields after graduation. Finally, our international programs such as IGCSE and the impending IB program, alongside the mandatory national program, prepare students for a range of further international education opportunities.

We are working towards a comprehensive blended learning model for the Jubilee School; a program that combines face-to-face education at school, the introduction of online content delivery and elements led by students that give them greater autonomy. We believe that blended learning will create a learning environment that is more collaborative and creative, and students who are challenged and more fulfilled. As regional and global networks expand, this approach offers unlimited opportunities here in Jordan and beyond.

I truly believe that the holistic model we have developed in the Jubilee Institute and School is an asset for Jordan’s development and prosperity and that of our region.

**Q: Your Majesty, you have visited the Jubilee School and met with many students. Can you please describe an encounter with a student that made you feel particularly optimistic for Jordan's future?**

A: It is impossible to single out one student or encounter because I have felt more optimistic, more hopeful and more inspired after every visit since we opened the school. The late King Hussein used to say that whenever he craved inspiration, he would visit the Jubilee School. He always felt motivated by our students' creativity, impressed by their skill and passion and proud of their dedication to Jordan and their communities.

In our students and graduates, I see a bright future for Jordan. Upon my last visit to the school, I had a chance to meet Hamzeh Fakhri, part of the winning team of this year's Microsoft Imagine Cup. His group had a passion for using technology to improve the world. While participating in Jubilee's comprehensive Community Service Program, they had observed particular health challenges that older Jordanians face. They created an ingenious smart jacket that monitors the vital signs of an elderly wearer. Their aim was to allow the elderly more privacy, dignity and comfort in maintaining their health.

This is only one example of so many over the years that reflects our emphasis on the value of service to the community and on students finding their own solutions to challenges on a local and international scale. I am so very proud of our graduates working here in Jordan and across the globe, who are succeeding in a wide array of fields, as well as their own entrepreneurial ventures, bringing credit to their families, their communities and our country.

I have to add here that I feel an enormous sense of privilege and humility wherever I am blessed to meet with the young people of Jordan, no matter where they have studied. In them, we can see the promise of a truly exciting future and they deserve to be supported and empowered by all of us to participate in, and contribute to, that future.

**Q: What message do you have for the parents of young girls? What is the single most important thing they do at home to make girls feel empowered and to pursue successful careers?**

A: The MENA region has the lowest level of participation by women in the labor force worldwide. Although women in Jordan have the highest educational attainment in the MENA region, their participation in the economic and political sphere is one of the lowest in the area. It frustrates so many of us that although Jordan has made such strides in terms of gender equality, especially in education, we still haven't fully harnessed the powerful potential of our women and girls to contribute to nation building at all levels. King Hussein and I shared the belief that without the full participation of each citizen, especially our women, Jordan's aspirations for national development were doomed to failure. Because of this, women's and girl's empowerment in terms of economic wellbeing, health and education have always been at the heart of our work at the Noor Al Hussein and King Hussein Foundations.

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And it is why the role of the family as well as the school is critical to the success of both boys and girls. Both girls and boys should learn from childhood to respect, value and support one another, at home and in society. Parents should recognize and try to neutralize the prevalence of negative societal stereotypes

about girls' abilities and roles, and this should be reinforced and complemented by schools, teachers and national curriculum.

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In addition to fighting stereotypes about women, there is a prevailing misunderstanding that school and home exist in two separate worlds, with different rules, a different structure and in which young people play different roles. The educational experience should not be compartmentalized into just the time that they spend in school – it should extend to the time that they spend at home with their families. Parents need to be engaged full-time: they need to be actively involved with the school in which their child is enrolled, and they need to engage with their sons and daughters when they are at home.

Outside of the home, the Jubilee School always strives to cultivate an environment of gender neutrality and to ensure that female students receive equal support and opportunities to succeed. Jubilee girls are some of Jordan's top achievers, including earning the first- and second-place marks in the country on the last Programme for International Student Assessment test. Last year, the student body elected Batool Wehdani as their Student Council president, paying tribute to her leadership skills and accomplishments. These are only two examples of our outstanding girls and the inclusive, respectful and supportive environment we try to promote at the school.

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I know that King Hussein to whom the school was dedicated so many years ago as a tribute to his almost half-century commitment to the highest standards of education for all in Jordan and beyond, would be very proud of how the seeds of the Jubilee School have blossomed and of all the bright young people of our country who are our hope for a better future.