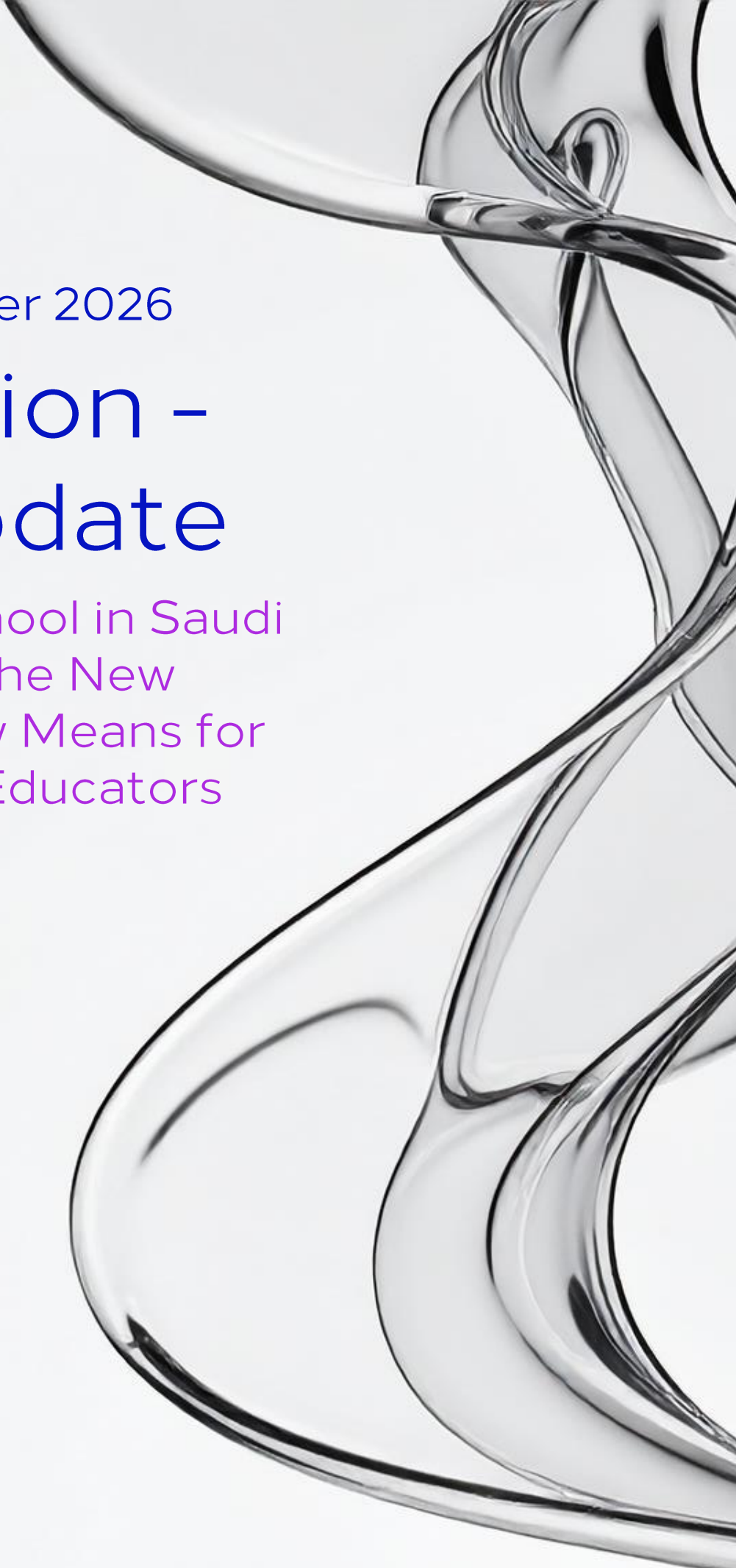




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Education - Law Update

Opening a School in Saudi
Arabia: What the New
Education Law Means for
International Educators

Opening a School in Saudi Arabia: What the New Education Law Means for International Educators

Saudi Arabia has rewritten the rulebook for schools. For the first time, one law covers everything from nursery to Grade 12, and it openly invites foreign investors in. This update explains what it means if you are thinking of setting up in the Kingdom.



Why this matters now

On 24 July 2026, Saudi Arabia published its new General Education Law (the “**Law**”) in the official gazette. It replaces a patchwork of rules, some dating back to 1969 (see Appendix), with a single, modern framework for public, private and international schools, nurseries, kindergartens and specialist providers.

For international educators, the headline is simple. **Foreign investment in schools is now written into the law itself.** The Law names the “foreign investor” several times and requires the Ministry of Education to actively encourage private and foreign investment in the sector.

The opportunity is clear. The Law puts compulsory schooling for ages 6 to 15 into statute. It places new weight on early years, special educational needs and gifted education. It also opens routes for private operators to run or develop state-owned school land and buildings.

Key dates at a glance

- 7 July 2026: the Law is approved by the Council of Ministers (Saudi Arabia’s Cabinet).
- 24 July 2026: the Law is published in the official gazette.
- 20 January 2027: the Law comes into force.
- By 20 January 2028 at the latest: the deadline for the General Education Affairs Council to issue rules replacing the old Private and Foreign Schools Regulations and the other repealed instruments. Until the replacements are issued, the old rules continue to apply.
- Date to be confirmed: the implementing regulations to the Law (the “Regulations”), to be issued by the Ministry of Education. The Law sets no deadline for these.

The Key Regulators



Ministry of Education (the “Ministry”).

The licensing authority and overall regulator. It approves new schools, curricula and international programmes, and any major changes once the school is open.

General Education Affairs Council (the “Council”). A new policy body chaired by the Minister of Education. It approves the detailed rules on fees, co-education, teaching in languages other than Arabic, online schools and private schools generally. Notably, its members include the Deputy Minister of Investment and two representatives from the private and non-profit sectors.

Education and Training Evaluation Commission (“ETEC”). The quality regulator. It runs national assessments, oversees school accreditation and administers teacher licensing.

National Curriculum Centre. It sets the national identity subjects that every private school must teach.

Ministry of Investment (“MISA”). For foreign investors, the first port of call and must register with the Ministry of Investment.

What it takes to set up a school

1. **Register and set up a company.** Foreign investors can own 100% of a school operating company in Saudi Arabia, so no Saudi partner is required. The investor will need to register with the Ministry of Investment and establish a company in the Kingdom before approaching the Ministry of Education. Settling the structure early matters, as it shapes everything that follows.
2. **Apply for the school licence.** No private school, nursery or kindergarten can be established without Ministry of Education approval. There is welcome certainty here: the Ministry must give you a written decision **within 30 days** of the application and must give reasons if it refuses. Refusals can be challenged.
3. **Choose the model.** The Law allows the Ministry to license schools that take a different approach to what they teach, how they teach it or how they are run. This is good news for Montessori, IB, bilingual, specialist or other distinctive approaches. The detailed conditions will follow in regulations.
4. **Secure the premises.** School buildings must meet standards set by the Ministry, and the Council will approve controls on how school buildings are occupied and operated. Build these requirements into the property search early.
5. **Get the curriculum approved.** International programmes need Ministry approval. Whatever curriculum is involved, it **must also teach the national identity subjects** set by the National Curriculum Centre, so the timetable should be planned around them. These are normally Arabic language, Religious and Social studies.
6. **Plan the language of instruction.** Under the Law, Arabic is the primary language of instruction. Teaching in another language, such as English, is permitted under controls to be approved by the Council.
7. **Obtain accreditation.** Accreditation is no longer optional: it is a legal requirement for every private school. It will need to be obtained from ETEC or from an international accreditation body that ETEC approves. The school will also need to take part in national and international assessments.
8. **Recruit licensed staff.** Teachers must hold a professional teaching licence. They must also follow a professional code of ethics and uphold national identity values, so factor this into overseas recruitment and induction.
9. **Set the fees.** The school is free to set its own fees, but any increase will need to fit within a framework that the Council approves. That framework has not yet been published.

What is flexible, what is fixed and what is still to come

Area	Position
Curriculum	Flexible: international programmes permitted with approval. Fixed: national identity subjects
Language	Fixed: Arabic is the primary language. Flexible: other languages permitted under Council controls (to come).
Co-education	To come: the Law allows the Council to lift gender separation for private schools. The controls have not yet been written and will need approval from the Council.
Online delivery	Fixed: in-person teaching is the default. To come: a new license for “virtual educational institutions”.
Fees	Flexible: the school sets its fees. To come: the framework for increases.
School Model	Flexible: the school sets its fees. To come: the framework for increases.

Other ways into the market

A full school is not the only way into the market. The Law also provides for:

- **Specialised centres.** A licensed category of provider serving students with disabilities, gifted learners and other specific groups.
- **Educational consulting.** Educational and pedagogical consulting is a licensed profession under the Law, with license's issued by the Ministry.
- **Partnerships with the state.** The Ministry can hand over the management or operation of government schools to private operators, including foreign investors. It can also assign land and buildings for private schools and give eligible private schools financial or in-kind support.

What to watch next

- The Regulations and Council decisions, especially on the fee framework, teaching in other languages, co-education and the definition of a “serious” staff violation.
- Which international accreditation bodies ETEC will recognise.
- The rules for virtual (online) schools.
- The first meetings of the General Education Affairs Council.

How can we help

Al Tamimi & Company's Education sector team advises international schools, operators and investors on entering and growing in Saudi Arabia. We cover investment structuring, licensing, curriculum and accreditation strategy, property, and employment.

To discuss your plans, please contact Ivor McGettigan, Head of Al Tamimi & Company's Education practice group at I.McGettigan@tamimi.com.



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