



## Education in the UAE

One of the UAE's highest priorities has always been education. As President His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder of the UAE, noted, "The greatest use that can be made of wealth is to invest it in creating generations of educated and trained people."

The UAE has focused on educating both men and women. In 1975, the rate of adult literacy was 54 percent among men and 31 percent among women. Today, literacy rates for both genders are nearly 90 percent.

New initiatives are being launched at all educational levels. A key area of focus has been to transform K to 12 programs, to ensure that UAE students are fully prepared to attend universities around the world and compete in the global marketplace. In addition, some of the world's best universities are creating programs in the UAE, attracting talented students in the Arab world and globally.

### K-12 Programs

The education system of the UAE is relatively new. In 1952, there were few formal schools in the country. In the 1960s and 1970s a school building program expanded the education system. Now, education at the primary and secondary level is universal. In 2006-2007, approximately 650,000 students were enrolled at 1,256 public and private schools. About 60 percent of all students attend public schools.

Education reform focuses on better preparation, greater accountability, higher standards and improved professionalism. In addition, rote instruction is being replaced with more interactive forms of learning, and English-language education is being integrated into other subjects, such as math and science. The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), the Dubai Education Council (DEC) and the UAE Ministry of Education are each tasked with education reform, while preserving local traditions, principles and the cultural identity of the UAE.

UAE President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan established ADEC in 2005 to develop education throughout the UAE. ADEC takes an entrepreneurial approach to involve the private sector, improve and modernize facilities, reduce bureaucracy, update curricula and take advantage of information technology.

ADEC enlisted Zayed University to help develop English-language skills of elementary-level students at four model schools. Thirty faculty members from ZU will work with the first and fourth grade students at these schools, observing and evaluating English language teaching methods, and designing modern academic programs. The initiative will be extended to all schools at a later stage.

The Dubai Education Council (DEC) seeks to meet global standards, focusing on international accreditation and comprehensive quality assurance programs. A recent

initiative is designed to attract world-class international primary and secondary schools to Dubai.

The Ministry of Education develops and monitors reform activities, with a focus on standards-based, student-centered education. These efforts include a partnership with National Association of Elementary School Principals in the United States. Activities include:

- Audits of every public school in the UAE
- Evaluations of the system, from individual schools up through the Ministry
- Ongoing professional development of teachers and principals.

### **Higher Education**

The UAE is home to a wide range of universities, both public and private. UAE citizens can attend government institutions free of charge, and the UAE has one of the highest application participation rates in the world. Ninety-five percent of all girls and 80 percent of boys enrolled in the final year of secondary school apply for admission to a higher education institution. UAE public universities include:

- **UAE University**, where enrollment has increased from 502 in its founding year (1977) to nearly 14,740 in 2006. Women represent 79 percent of the student body. UAE University awards 70 undergraduate degrees as well as some graduate degrees. Many of its programs are internationally accredited. ([www.uaeu.ac.ae](http://www.uaeu.ac.ae))
- **Zayed University**, established in 1998 as an all-women's institution, and later expanded to include men. Organized into five colleges—Arts and Sciences, Business Sciences, Communication and Media Sciences, Education, and Information Systems, the primary language of instruction is English. ([www.zu.ac.ae](http://www.zu.ac.ae))
- **Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT)**, the largest higher educational institution with an enrollment of 16,000 UAE nationals. Founded in 1988 with four campuses, HCT now includes 16 men's and women's colleges in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Madinat Zayed, Dubai, Ra's al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Fujairah. The colleges offer more than 80 programs at four different credential levels—Diploma, Higher Diploma, Bachelor and Masters. More than 10,000 of the current students are female. ([www.hct.ac.ae](http://www.hct.ac.ae))

### **Private Institutions**

Some of the key private institutions include:

- American Universities of Sharjah and Dubai, both of which are also accredited in the United States
- Sharjah University
- Ajman University of Science and Technology
- Abu Dhabi University, with campuses in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain
- Al Hosn University.

The Masdar Institute for Science and Technology began accepting students in 2009. MIST is the Middle East's first graduate education and research university focused on developing the next generation of solutions to the world's dependence on fossil fuels.

## Global Partnerships

A number of international universities have campuses or programs in the UAE. Some are housed in special zones, including Dubai Knowledge Village and Academic City. These are multi-university complexes that attract students from the region who are unable to go abroad to study. More than 25 universities are located, or planning to be located, in these special Free Zones.

Other special programs include:

- The **Sorbonne** opened its Abu Dhabi campus in 2006 and will award qualifications under French regulations and standards set by the Sorbonne in Paris.
- **New York University** is the first comprehensive liberal arts and sciences campus with a robust research component to be operated abroad by a major US university. A temporary campus has opened in Abu Dhabi. When the main campus opens on Saadiyat Island, the school will serve over 2,000 undergraduate and graduate students, principally from the Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Europe.
- **Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health** is helping establish a public health doctoral program in the Emirates.
- Other US institutions include Michigan State University and Rochester Institute of Technology.

## Technical Education

Founded in 1997, the **Centre of Excellence for Applied Research and Training (CERT)** is the commercial arm of the Higher Colleges of Technology and provides education, training and applied technology. The company is the largest private education provider in the Middle East and is developing projects throughout the MENA region.

Other vocational and technical educational centers are sponsored by the:

- Emirates Institute for Banking and Finance
- Abu Dhabi National Oil Company Career Development Center
- Petroleum Institute
- Dubai School of Government
- Emirates Aviation College for Aerospace and Academic Studies.

## Special Education

The government of the UAE recognizes the need to support students with special needs. The UAE signed the optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Federal Law 29/2006 guarantees rights for people with special needs. Vocational and rehabilitation centers have been developed throughout the country. In addition, efforts are made to include special needs students in mainstream educational settings. The UAE also participates in the Special Olympics.

A partnership between the government of Abu Dhabi and the New England Center for Children, a Massachusetts school serving children with autism, established a comprehensive education program as well as trains UAE nationals to provide services in Arabic.

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