



# SCHOOL'S IN

*Building a knowledge-based economy is central to Abu Dhabi's Economic Vision 2030. As such, Abu Dhabi is promoting the growth of universities, as well as doing tie-ups with major players such as MIT to advance education in the Emirate.*

**A**s Abu Dhabi looks to the future, its government is placing a firm focus on education. The country's leadership knows that to be a world-class nation it must foster a world-class population, so the development of a homegrown knowledge base forms the bedrock of Abu Dhabi's ambitious long-term development plans.

When the capital emirate first began producing oil in 1962, it had just 20 schools with a combined enrolment of fewer than 4,000 students and no post-secondary institutions. At the time of its federation in 1971, the entire UAE had a student population of less than 28,000. However, high government spending on the education sector since dramatically ramped up student numbers in recent years.

According to the Oxford Business Group (OGB) 'Abu Dhabi report', "Government spending on education remains high, guided by mid-and long-term strategies targeting innovation, career development and outcomes in the kindergarten-to-grade-12 (K-12), vocational education and training, and higher education segments.

"At the post-secondary level these strategies have seen strong growth in enrolment, including the burgeoning vocational and PhD segments, while the emirate's rising population and the resulting expansion of private K-12 schools led authorities to roll out a progressive new curriculum – in addition to what are perhaps the region's most stringent monitoring and evaluation frameworks."

According to data from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR), the number of post-secondary students increased by 58.6% between 2008 and 2013 from 32,360 to 51,333 students – or 40% of the UAE's total post-secondary student body. Across the UAE, enrolment in PhD programmes has shown dramatic growth of more than 1,500% between 2008 and 2013, increasing from 32 students in 2008 to 537 in 2013.

Abu Dhabi's government provides financial support to several private institutions as part of its efforts to increase the level of educational attainment of its citizens. For example, Khalifa University, established in 2007, is fully-owned and funded by the emirate, enabling free tuition for the majority of students. The university offers bachelor's degrees



in engineering and science, and master's degrees in electrical, computer and nuclear engineering, as well as several PhD programmes.

Dean Hoke, co-founder of Edu Alliance, a higher education consulting firm based in Abu Dhabi, says, "It's important to note that the Abu Dhabi government has developed Khalifa University, an outstanding homegrown undergraduate and graduate school. In 10 years, it has become a top 400 university in the world. The university, which primarily has UAE students, has taken a successful approach of focusing on engineering programmes with international faculty from top schools throughout the world."

Hoke adds that with the recently announced merger of Khalifa University, Masdar Institute, and the Petroleum Institute (The Khalifa University of Science and Technology), "the combined universities may better marshal their combined resources to enhance academic quality, research and to give the UAE a university which will be one of the world's best."

While Abu Dhabi's post-secondary education sector has undoubtedly witnessed growth in the past decade, the emirate's universities are still looking to increase student numbers, particularly in the postgraduate segment. According to the OBG report, "The government's focus on research and innovation has fostered strong expansion of postgraduate programmes and enrolment in recent years, with both Emirati and international students attracted by government and corporate funding, prestigious international branch

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campuses and other incentives."

Hoke says serious government commitment is the single biggest factor in building a highly educated populace. "The key is commitment by the government to fund and promote education from K-20." The education expert says the UAE has made "remarkable" progress and has put significant funding into developing a highly educated population.

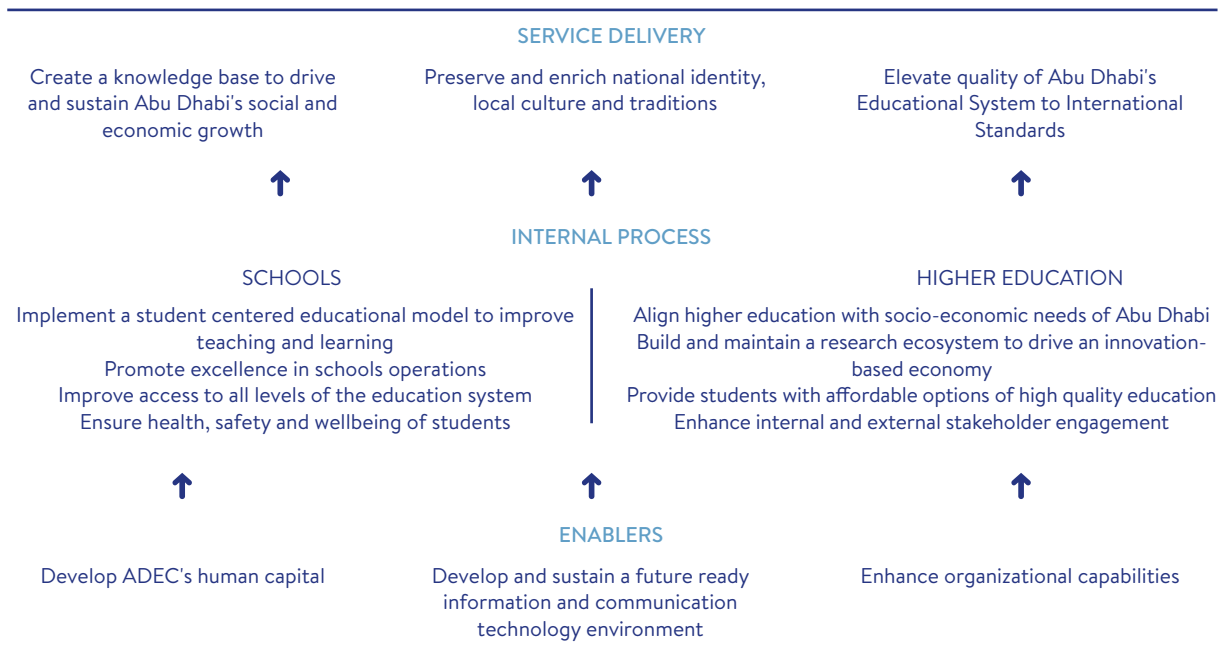
He says, "Rather than focusing on sending its students to go to university outside, the UAE has brought good international universities to the UAE, as well as built its own universities and vocational institutions and colleges. Abu Dhabi has also developed academic partnerships with American and European universities and recruited university faculty to teach in these institutions."

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## ADEC CORPORATE STRATEGY MAP

TO DELIVER A HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT ENABLES ALL LEARNERS TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AND SUPPORT ABU DHABI'S GROWTH AND PROSPERITY



In the last few years the capital emirate has forged partnerships with some of the world's most prestigious educational institutions, including INSEAD, New York University, Paris-Sorbonne University and MIT. Hoke notes, "The government understands that the Emirati students who are attending university or have graduated from these institutions will become leaders in industry, science and government."

Suveer Arenja, head of investments and strategy at Al Najah Education, an education investment platform of private equity firm, Al Masah Capital, agrees that the quality of a nation's educational institutions has a huge impact on its people's education, workforce and economic development. "Eminent universities such as MIT have the history, knowledge and resources to be able to maintain a superior quality of teaching in their international campuses, hence significantly enhancing students' access to high quality education. Their local presence also allows other universities to learn industry best practice, which improves the overall quality of education being provided in the country."

Iain Colledge, principal at Abu Dhabi's Raha

International School, says building a world-class education is "about great teachers, great schools, global collaboration among schools and education bodies, continued research, adaptability to a rapidly changing world, being innovative and allowing schools the autonomy to adapt to their student body. Sharing is essential."

Colledge affirms that partnering with major players in education, such as MIT, is set to have a significant impact on the UAE education sector. "Their experience and knowledge that has been developed over time could be injected into the UAE. Much like a shot of adrenaline, this knowledge and experience could have a quick and meaningful impact raising the standard and performance of teaching and learning."

"Likewise, the prestige of having such partnerships will attract and help retain talented educators. The UAE would benefit by using their expertise and guidance to further develop its own talent and thus create a self-sustaining culture of excellence, similar to what exists at MIT or other institutions. To borrow from Isaac Newton, by standing on the shoulders of giants, the education sector is able to see further and advance quicker." 🌟