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Schools // Training

Emirati students warm to private sector jobs

Tala al Ramahi

ABU DHABI // A project training young Emiratis to find private sector jobs may expand after a successful trial run.

Students from three schools in the capital last week finished a 23-week course, the first of its kind in the emirate's public schools, that encourages Emiratis to pursue careers in private industry.

The 120 10th-grade students took part in mock interviews and undertook a week-long internship at private and semi-private companies including DLA Piper, Shell and Abu Dhabi Aircraft Technologies.

They also participated in a computerised role-playing game named *World of Work*, in which the stu-

dents selected the lifestyle they wanted, then saw how career choices could bring that lifestyle about – including paying for items such as a Maserati GranTurismo 2009 car or a four-room villa in Umm Suqeim.

Organisers said the effort helps shatter myths about the private sector while expanding job options for Emiratis who have completed their education.

The education programme Tawteen implemented the pilot project with the Abu Dhabi Education Council. Both are now considering expanding it to 12 to 20 more government schools by the next academic year, said Gregor Cameron, a teaching and learning consultant at the Abu Dhabi Education Council.

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Students warming to industry

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Mr Cameron said: "It is about giving students choices, letting them look at their aspirations, and being able to practically visualise where they will be going in their near future."

Although the programme was greeted warmly by most of the students involved, some resistance came from parents who "were worried it would distract their children from their school work and classes," said Malak Hurqus, a case manager at Tawteen.

Such concerns were eased by involving parents in the project, she said, to "show parents how their support can lead to their children's future success."

The programme, said Susan Sandouka, director of Tawteen, is a "conduit between the private sector and young Emirati talent to drive forward the number of Emiratis who will develop a career within the private sector."

For most of the students, it was the first time they had written a CV or been interviewed by an employer, both of which were required before their internships.

Last year, Abdullah al Darmaki, the executive director of the Abu Dhabi Emiratization Council, said the future of the emirate's economy depended upon more Emiratis entering the private sector.

"We need to be self dependent to some extent," he said. "Expatriates only come to an economy during a boom period. When things slow down, they look for the next opportunity. We need to be able to fill that vacuum."

Mohammed Fuad, 15, who attends Al Ruwad Model School in Bani Yas, interned at Injazat Data Systems and said he had no idea what the private sector even was.

"You know, we always thought that when we finish school, we either have to go to the army or join the police force or work in a ministry," he said. "But now we know what is out there for us and what it feels like to be a part of this environment." He said he hoped to become a software programmer.

Mohammed said he loved the "freedom of the work environment



Four students from government schools participating in an internship at Injazat Data Systems. From left, Abdulrahman Al Wahidi, 16, Mohammed Fuad, 15, Khalid Naji Al Mansoori, 15, and Rashid Al Marikil, 16. Jaline Puubla / The National

because no one is glaring over your shoulder all the time", but he also said he realised such freedoms come with a lot of responsibility. "You have to put more effort to grasp new concepts and must try harder to solve problems you haven't encountered before. You have to be responsible for yourself not because someone else is supervising you," he added.

Before the students were assigned to their internships, they were asked for their career preferences. Most were granted their first option, but some were not. Such was the case with Noura al Marzouqi, 15, who initially resisted her placement at DLA Piper, a law firm in the city.

After her week-long internship with the firm, Noura says she wants to be a lawyer.

"Did you know I can represent my clients in court because I am an Emirati? I did not know that," she said. "I would love to be there and help people in need."

Noura sat in at the firm's meetings and learnt how to use the company's database and conduct research.

"I wanted to work in an office with the public sector before, but now everything has changed."

She added that her parents, who sensed her enthusiasm, are now pushing her "to be a lawyer so I

can be a role model for other local girls."

The interns worked with Emirati mentors, when possible. One mentor was Yousef al Naimi, a medical division manager at Ben Salem Medical Group, another work experience host.

Mr al Naimi, who worked in a "routine" public-sector job for six years, said he received a lot of cautionary words from his family and friends because of his decision to leave.

"They kept telling me that I will fall in the private sector and that it is so unpredictable," he said.

He said his persistence paid off, although there are challenges to taking a private job.

"I wish I had such a programme when I was younger," he said. "The thing is, most of us Emiratis don't like going to school because we get loaded with books and then sit at the desk for eight hours of memorisation."

He said programmes like Tawteen's will help break down "misconceptions" young Emiratis have about the private sector.

"Most of us in the past chose our field of work without knowing anything about it. It was influenced by other factors, like our parents and our teachers," he said.

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Young Emirati men need more motivation, federal study says

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Among unemployed people between the ages of 15 to 22, more than half (55 per cent) were male, according to the report. Since young men in this age group are less likely to attend university and join the workforce, they may encounter social difficulties, unlike women, for whom it is more socially acceptable to stay at home.

As for young people with Aids, the report said the number was "under control". Only 52 such cases are known in the past eight years, and 48 of them are male.

"Based on this information Aids is under control as far as youth in the UAE is concerned," the report says. "But it is important to point out that males are more vulnerable to the outside influences that contribute to the spread of HIV, the virus that causes Aids, due to engaging in illegitimate relations with females of other nationalities."

This is in contrast to young Emirati women, it says, who are more bound by the morals and traditions of their culture, which minimises their exposure to the virus. A decadent life with easy access to powerful cars and a great deal of personal freedom puts young men at high risk of getting killed in a car accident.

According to the report, there were 355 accidental deaths of

young Emiratis last year, 79 per cent of them male, "with the main reason for most of these deaths being traffic accidents".

The country is one of the most "globalised" in the world, and ranks number one in the Arab world in terms of internet use, according to the report.

More than 50 per cent of people living in the UAE (both nationals and expatriates) use the internet, a figure higher than overall internet usage in the EU. But the report cautions that easy and affordable access to the internet combined with young people's habit of travelling and studying abroad and their continuous exposure to other cultures within the country could have a corrosive effect on local traditions.

The report says the country's openness in exchanging expertise with the outside world does not make it immune to the effects of foreign ideas among the young, especially those who are sent abroad.

"These new values may contradict Emirati traditions and way of life, also threatening the core of national identity, making this an important issue to watch," it says. The UAE was ranked 21 on the latest report of most globalised countries, produced by the Arab Establishment for Investment Insurance.

Young Emirati women have especially benefited from their coun-

try's advancement as they now have much greater access to higher education and employment. Women at university, including medical school, outnumber men by almost three to one, and this figure continues to rise.

While young women attend university, many men join the armed forces or law enforcement agencies instead, which explains the high level of employment among young men compared with young women.

Two important challenges the report expects today's youth to face in the future are water shortage and over consumption.

Already Emiratis use more water per capita than almost anyone else in the world, averaging 280 to 320 litres per day, more than twice the amount an average European uses.

Food security, too, will be a challenge, as less than one per cent of the country's land is designated for agriculture. High inflation has translated into high food prices, and by the year 2011 the country will be paying more than Dh60 billion for imports of foodstuff, compared with Dh52 billion two years ago.

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Aids is under control as far as youth in the UAE is concerned

Government report

Water use a major challenge

The new report from the General Authority for Youth and Sport says reducing water consumption is one of the key challenges facing the nation's youth. The average daily water consumption of 280 to 320 litres per person in the Emirates is more than double Europe's 140 to 150 litres. "This is a frightening rate," the report by the General Authority of Youth and Sport said, adding that the country faced a water crisis if the problem was not addressed. Habiba al Marashi, the chairman

of Emirates Environmental Group, a Dubai-based NGO involved in environmental campaigning and education, said there was a high level of indifference to water conservation, though younger people were developing a better understanding of how to protect the environment. Policy and regulation were also moving in the right direction. "The level of apathy in the country is high, and environmental awareness is low," Ms al Marashi added. -Rasha Elasa