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Pupils hope for university head start

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DUBAI // Students seeking the elusive prize of a place at one of the world's most prestigious universities are hoping a workshop in Dubai will give them a head start.

While many schools in the West have specialised programmes that prepare pupils for the gruelling process of applying to universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, or Yale, the same is not true of Dubai.

"Students here falter when it comes to applying for the best universities in the world. Why?" said Sanjeev Verma, director of Intelligent Partners, the firm organising the workshop. "Because the student has never had any assistance when it comes to essay-writing skills and interviewing skills. They are just not available in most of the schools here."

The workshop will begin with a three-day introduction at Knowledge Village next month. A group of the pupils will then go on to a two-week course in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, UK, starting in June.

According to Mr Verma, pupils here are largely unequipped when it comes to applying to these types of universities.

Mr Verma said the universities "are not looking for students; rather they are looking for leaders".

"We are trying to mould the kids, and make their applications stand out from the 10,000 applications that the university receives."

Ramesh Mahalingam, who is enrolling his son in the workshop, said: "This is a pivotal time in the children's career. This is where they can make the difference between being accepted to a good school and an average school."

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The April workshop will be hosted by experts from the UK and US. Seminars will address topics such as what international qualifications are acceptable for which universities; the differences between US and UK degrees; what pupils should do to prepare; and how to maximise the pupil's chances of being made an offer. Pupils will also take assessment tests and parents will be able to meet the advisers.

"The best thing about it is that the consultant is an independent person, not a parent, which carries a lot more weight with the children," said Mr Mahalingam. "They accept the advice given so much more readily."

The workshop is open to pupils of all nationalities at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. According to Mr Verma, 10 to 25 pupils annually get into Ivy League or Oxbridge universities from the UAE for undergraduate studies, and another "handful" as postgraduates. "The majority of those applying for undergraduate study abroad tend to be expats, but then when it comes to

postgraduates, there are a large number of locals," he added.

Gauri Gupta, a 16-year-old pupil at the International Chouefait School in Dubai, has enrolled for the workshop. She plans to apply to universities such as the London School of Economics and Edinburgh University. "Some students have taken the initiative to do extra-curricular activities in preparation for university, she said, but it is not something that is necessarily done through her school. "I've had to do my own research to find out what I need to do and what universities want."

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