

Emiratis look to other countries for education

Foreign study programmes

Some say they get stronger instruction and a better chance to improve their English abroad

Melanie Swan

ABU DHABI // Even though several foreign universities have set up campuses in the UAE, more Emiratis are choosing to study in other countries.

This week, universities from the world's top three destinations for foreign study, the US, UK and Canada, are taking part in the Think Education, Think Intelligent fair, reaching out to UAE students.

Yoseph Asfaw, general manager at Intelligent Gulf, which is organising the fair, said the long-established institutions and wider range of courses, as well as the cultural experience of studying abroad, still attract thousands of students each year.

"There is a growth in the UAE in terms of the infrastructure but there is still work to be done in terms of the quality of the institutions," he said.

"It will also take time before there is the diversity that you can find in countries such as the US and the UK while universities look into what the demand is, rather than setting up a programme that attracts just a few students."

Hundreds of students this week were expected to attend the fair,

which began on Tuesday at Abu Dhabi Men's College and finishes today at Dubai Knowledge Village. There have also been visits in between to schools including Al Nahda in Abu Dhabi, and the Dubai International Academy.

Universities taking part include Oregon State University from the US; Lancaster University from the UK; and Navitas, which offers programmes in the US, UK, Canada and Australia.

"Students are very keen to have this face-to-face time with admissions staff to get that immediate feedback," Mr Asfaw said.

"Reaching out to them in schools from as young as grade 10, we can help better prepare them for what they need to do to qualify academically and advise them on extra-curricular activities, which will help them, too, like community work or sports."

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research accredits 69 universities and colleges around the country. There are dozens more in free zones in Dubai and Ras al Khaimah.

But Maktoum Ali, 18, from Abu Dhabi, hopes to study in the US next year.



A student gets counselling at a foreign

"If I study abroad, I will improve my English, and everyone says that the standard of education is better," he said.

Benjamin Phair, representing New York's Manhattan College, which offers scholarships to all UAE students of US\$3,000 (Dh11,017) per year, said it "enriches" campus life to have students from the Gulf.

"It's only in the last couple of years that they've really started to increase the Arab student body," he said. "It enriches everyone's experience to have this bigger mix."

Tim Carnley, the British Council's Education UK promotion manager, said that between 2008 and 2009, the number of Emirati postgraduate students in the UK rose by 30 per cent. "The main reasons students choose to study in the UK are the fact that perceptions of the quality