



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATION

THE UAE INVESTS HEAVILY IN THE EDUCATION of its young citizens, believing education to be the key to future prosperity in an increasingly globalised economy. Free education facilitates access for all citizens at every level of the system. At the same time, the UAE's attitude towards education for women is well demonstrated by recent figures from UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report showing the UAE to be one of only 15 countries where girls outnumber boys in the formal education system and, with a gender parity index (GPI) of 1.12, one of only two Gulf states where the education balance is tipped in favour of girls.

Guiding the educationalists in their efforts to keep up with a rapidly changing cultural and economic environment is Vision 2020, the Ministry of Education's policy document outlining a strategy for further educational development in the UAE up to the year 2020. Education 2020 Strategy is a series of five-year plans, designed to introduce advanced education techniques and improve innovative skills and the self-learning abilities of students. A Planning, Development and Evaluation Office devises the plans and uses model schools to implement them. The National Centre for the Development of Curriculum and Methodology reviews curricula and developments in educational methodology. All developments take place within the Strategy's framework.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Primary and secondary education is provided for all UAE citizens in a four-tier process and is compulsory at primary level. A total of 317,000 primary and high school students started the new academic year of 2003/2004 in the country's 1500 or so public and private schools (as well as the public school system, excellent private schools abound in the UAE). Almost 29,000 students attending state and private schools with Arab curricula took the General Secondary School Certificate (GSSC) in 2003, compared with 26,792 in 2002. The majority of examinees were in the arts and science streams. For the very first time in the UAE, GSSC results were sent to pre-registered mobile customers using Etisalat's SMS Risala service.

Curriculum Changes

A plan released by the Ministry of Education and Youth (MoE) at the end of 2002 indicates a switch from instruction-oriented education to self-education, along with

a comprehensive programme for student care, covering their social, psychological and career needs. The major challenge facing any system undergoing such a fundamental change is how to re-educate a teaching population that has itself been educated and trained under the old regime. A holistic approach that sees the student rather than the teacher as the centre of the educational process requires a total rearrangement of teaching values and methods.

An enhanced curriculum for mathematics and integrated science was introduced at first grade level for the 2003/2004 academic year in all government schools, as part of the new educational paradigm which aims to provide a holistic learning environment, embracing student, family and teacher in a shared experience. Part of the Vision 2020 strategy is to allow the educational zones more autonomy to enable them to pursue their own development projects, within set guidelines. Also scheduled was a switch from class teachers to subject teachers at primary level.

In view of research carried out by the UAE University's College of Education, the curriculum change is timely. The researchers found that a majority of science students at secondary school level lacked the ability to interpret or transform the information contained in graphs, pointing to a need for a shift from a passive culture of rote learning to an active culture of applied learning.

The emiratization of teaching staff is scheduled to reach 90 per cent by the year 2020. But the process of emiratization makes continuous in-service training for teaching staff all the more imperative. Many studies have shown that one of the main barriers to the employment of UAE nationals is a poor grasp of English and a drive is on to change this by introducing a new English syllabus to all government schools over the next three years. The course, 'The UAE New Parade' developed by Longman, has already been tested in the Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Fujairah educational zones and results were very encouraging. One of the advantages of the new curriculum is that teachers who may themselves have weak language skills can take advantage of its ongoing training.

Student Website

An important initiative by the MoE in activating the process of self-education has been the setting up of an interactive, bilingual website for school students, www.moeya.ae. Intended to become an authoritative guide for the different disciplines, its activities include educational tours, art festivals, science fairs and talent shows; it is also a meeting place for students, a place where they can access information in privacy about a wide range of topics from science and sports to student welfare. The website runs interscholastic tournaments and quizzes designed to develop a range of skills and abilities, and it is also a channel through which companies and institutions can reach out to students. Training courses for teachers will help increase their computer and information skills and the site is updated weekly by coordinator teachers themselves.



Computer Training

In a dynamic move to make its schools 'electronically connected, culturally oriented educational institutions of comprehensive quality and regional impact', the Abu Dhabi Educational Zone has entered into an infotech agreement with the UNESCO-backed ICDL UAE to implement the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) programme in all faculties of the zone's schools. Already over 120 teachers and supervisors have participated in the programme and, by 2008, all faculties under the zone will be required to complete the ICDL certification to verify their computer skills.

Another important computer training initiative, the IT Education Project (ITEP), was launched by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in 2000 as part of a larger vision to establish the UAE as the knowledge hub of the region. ITEP started in the year 2000, training first- and second-year secondary Dubai school students in IT. To date, 21,000 secondary school students have participated in the Project. It currently covers all secondary schools in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and will ultimately be introduced throughout the UAE. Providing a high quality, industry-relevant IT education, ITEP complements the Ministry of Education's aim of introducing new means of teaching. The IT academies in Dubai and Abu Dhabi are the vital administrative heart of the project. They are responsible for teacher training and courseware development, Internet-based anytime, anywhere, adaptive learning, project management and quality assurance for all ITEP initiatives.

Dubai Education Council

The creation of the new Dubai Education Council is an indication of the commitment of the UAE's vibrant business centre to integrating IT into education as the key to maintaining a successful economy, as well as a recognition of the need to modernise the education system. The Council's board, comprising ten top educational and cultural figures, is entrusted with the task of devising an educational strategy that dovetails with the requirements of UAE society and the IT era. The Council is to be funded through the allocation of 5 per cent of the income from the Palm and Jumeirah Residence projects in Dubai.

Environmental Programmes

The Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency's (ERWDA) schools' programmes attracted more than 13,000 students throughout Abu Dhabi during 2002/2003. The programmes are tailored to different age groups and range from in-class discussions, workshops and projects to field trips, clean-ups and environmental excellence awards for schools and their pupils.

One of the largest yearly projects which ERWDA runs, in conjunction with The Emirates Wildlife Society (EWS), Sharjah's Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), is the Enviro-spellathon. Sponsored by Shell, the participation has been enormous. In its first year (2002),



the contest attracted 45,000 participants from 172 schools in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and the Western Region. In 2003 the competition was thrown open to the entire country. Participating students must read and comprehend information supplied by ERWDA on local plants, animals and habitats; the process develops awareness on issues of environmental importance in a student population that is, in the main, urban and very distanced from nature.

Scholarships and Awards

The Sheikh Latifa Childhood Creativity Awards, organised by Dubai Women's Association, has been quietly encouraging children to explore their creative side for the past six years. The competition is open to children of all nationalities in the UAE, but is conducted only in Arabic. It is open for any foundation, organisation or centre in the UAE that cares for children, including those with special needs.

The Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum Award for Distinguished Academic Performance, initiated in 1999, rewards the high achievers, encourages fresh talent and targets the improvement of performance and excellence. Certificates of recognition, an excellence cup and a financial prize are awarded in several categories covering students, teachers, school social workers, research, project work, schools, administration and educational districts.

The Rashid Award, in existence since 1988, is one of the most significant recognitions of academic excellence in the UAE, honouring and rewarding UAE students who have achieved outstanding results at their respective academic levels. More than 2000 winners have been honoured since the award began. In 2003, a prize fund of over Dh7 million was awarded to 335 UAE nationals holding doctorate, masters and post-graduate degrees from various colleges and universities in the country, in addition to outstanding students in the General Secondary School Certificate (GSSC).

The EDAAD scholarship programme was initiated in 2000 with the ultimate goal of enhancing the skills of national talent and accelerating the overall development of the UAE in the new age. Successful candidates have the opportunity to pursue their undergraduate/graduate studies at distinguished universities worldwide.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Admissions to higher education in the UAE continue to boom. Out of 12,057 eligible students, 11,325 registrations were recorded for the academic year 2003/2004. While UAE University (UAEU) recorded an increase of 258 in registered students, rising from 3972 for 2002/2003 to 4230 in 2003/2004, Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) dropped slightly from 6501 to 6211 over the same period. Registration figures for Zayed University (ZU) for women improved from 635 to 884. Women account for 2934 of UAEU's total registration, an increase on the previous year's figure of 2742. Female students continue to outnumber their

male counterparts, comprising 65 per cent of those seeking further education. Within the HCT system, the men's colleges recorded a registration figure of 2671, while 3450 students registered at women's colleges. Although the number of women registered in the HCT has dropped from the 2002/2003 figure of 3768, the increase in female registration at both ZU and UAEU more than makes up for this deficit.

National Research Foundation

The establishment of a National Research Foundation, announced by the Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research at the fourth Pan-Arab Conference of the Arab Alumni of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), should enhance the already burgeoning research initiatives evident at the universities and within the colleges of the HCT. As the Minister made clear in announcing the new foundation, research is no longer a luxury, but a necessity requiring funding and a sound infrastructure.

Zayed University

Zayed University (ZU) first opened its doors to students as recently as 1998. Popular from its inception, the University, which has campuses in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai, is no longer big enough to cope with demand. A major expansion, to encompass a total area of 711,000 square metres and comprising six colleges, departments and laboratories, has been approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Between now and 2017, student numbers are to increase to 7000 (a number which for the first time will include male students). The Dubai-based construction has a projected cost of Dh300 million and the development is scheduled to take place in three phases. An inaugural intake of 2000 students is scheduled for 2005.

The reason for ZU's success lies partly in its openness to fresh ways of thinking and doing. Smart Square, located in Dubai Internet City (DIC) and fast becoming a thriving centre of fecund innovation and cross-community initiatives, is an example of the ZU approach. This cooperative venture between ZU and IBM aims to establish a new business partner in the UAE for private and public institutions to enhance their e-business and communication activities. Officially inaugurated in early 2003 and offering full service from conceptualisation to turnkey delivery, Smart Square is the first of its kind to be established in the region. The National Human Resources Development and Employment Authority (Tanmia) recently signed an agreement to sponsor a section of the graduate on-the-job training for projects undertaken by Smart Square, as part of its policy of equipping nationals with the necessary skills for today's demanding work environment. The Square has also signed MoUs with the Ministry of Finance and Industry (MFI) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and, as part of the partnership agreement with the MFI, has undertaken to devise and administer a strategy for delivery of the Federal Government's e-Government scheme, the first phase of which began in March 2003.

The formal opening of the Centre for Professional Development of UAE Educators at Smart Square in February 2003 was a confirmation of the existence of a centre that had already put down its marker as an educator of educators. Established as part of the process to reform the UAE educational system, the Centre was already providing quality developmental courses for teachers and administrators at primary and secondary level in such vital areas as critical thinking, teaching with technology and the teaching of mathematics to primary children.

UAE University

UAE University (UAEU), established in 1976, comprises nine colleges and is committed to its role as a leading teaching and research institution in the UAE. UAEU has been forging connections within and beyond the UAE in order to secure financial support for its Scientific Research Affairs Sector (SRAS) research projects and to foster exchange and cooperation. Organisations with which agreements have recently been finalised include the UAE Engineers Association, Al Ain Municipality and Town Planning Department, Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Paris-based International Cooperation Centre for Agricultural Research, and the Khartoum-based Arab Authority for Investment and Agriculture Development.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) and UAEU have signed an agreement to conduct a research project for a total value of Dh723,000, to evaluate the effectiveness of three dams in supplying groundwater resources in the country, while an MoU with Dubai Municipality gives UAEU access to Dubai Central Laboratory (one of the leading such facilities in the country), and the municipality will benefit from the research and expertise of UAEU academics.

In a joint venture between UAEU, the Department of Geology and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) of the University of California, the first seismic laboratory to measure earthquake activity in the region has been set up. Two broadband remote sensing units have been installed at two separate points, one in Hail near Fujairah, the other near Jebel Hafit in Al Ain. The venture is particularly timely, given that the UAE experienced an earthquake (5.1 on the Richter scale) in Masafi in 2002.

Higher Colleges of Technology

In 1988 a system of colleges offering a more technically oriented education was devised. The four founding HCTs began the new experiment with an enrolment of 239 students. Today, the HCT is a system of 11 single-sex campuses offering over 75 programmes to more than 15,000 UAE students and at the end of the 2002/03 academic year in excess of 13,000 graduates had received awards through the HCT.

Crucial links between the HCT and industry are supplied by the Centre of Excellence for Applied Research and Training (CERT), the commercial arm of the



HCT established in 1996. The Centre has created strategic alliances with a number of large multinational organisations to develop a diverse range of business and technology solutions. It offers courses in a variety of fields and provides professional development and lifelong learning opportunities for the UAE, the Gulf region, and – through its online training courses – many other parts of the business world. Already operating two technology parks in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, CERT recently opened offices in Dubai Internet City.

A powerful CERT tool is the relationship that it has built up with international partners. Three organisations are currently in operation: The CERT Thales Institute (CTI) – a partnership between CERT and Thales Université in Paris, delivering short- and long-term programmes through a corporate university structure based in Abu Dhabi; Abu Dhabi Petroleum University – a consortium of world-class higher education institutions, including the HCT, Texas A&M University, Heriot-Watt University and the University of Oklahoma, providing educational and professional development opportunities for students preparing to enter the industry or for professionals already employed in the sector; CERT Teachers College (CTC) – a high quality teachers college based on the existing programme at HCT. Programme development is carried out in conjunction with the University of Melbourne and the University of Wollongong.

A non-profit professional association, the Emirates Project Management Association (EPMA), is the result of a liaison between CERT and Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Association (ADWEA). The new association, located at the CERT Technology Park in Abu Dhabi, will provide accredited training courses, seminars and conferences in project management. The EPMA is affiliated with the leading international certification and accrediting bodies including International Project Management Association (IPMA) and Project Management Institute (PMI). Dovetailing with the association's formation was the launch of a new Masters programme in Project and Programme Management.

An interesting spin-off from the three-day biennial conference (organised by the students, faculty and staff of the HCT and attended by more than 500 students from 70 countries as well as senior business personnel and educationists) has been an agreement between CERT and the Edward de Bono Foundation (EDBF) to develop the first-ever Festival of Thinkers.

Other Institutions

The significant message to come out of the Fourth General Assembly of the Association of Arab Private Institutions for Higher Education, organised by Ajman University of Science and Technology and attended by senior academics from 14 Arab countries, was that privatising higher education play a positive role in enhancing the quality of education in the Arab world.

Many excellent private institutions offer a wide range of third level opportunities. Notable institutions include the American Universities of Sharjah and Dubai, Sharjah University and the Ajman University of Science and Technology. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is responsible for the accreditation of institutes and degrees and its website (www.uae.gov.ae/mohe/) provides a comprehensive list of recognised institutes and programmes.

A new Ajman University of Science and Technology (AUST) campus, which will be capable of accommodating between 6500 and 7000 students (it currently has the capacity for 3000), was opened in Fujairah at the beginning of 2003. The three-storey building, on 6000 square metres, houses eight departments and is fully equipped with laboratories and the best of modern communication systems enabling video conferencing and other state-of-the-art technologies. This adds to the campuses that already exist at Ajman, Abu Dhabi and Al Ain.

Two new universities to come on stream in the UAE are the British University (BU) in Dubai's Knowledge Village and Abu Dhabi University (ADU), located on two campuses – in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain. The former, which has taken three years to reach fruition, is the only research-based university in the region. Offering introductory and foundation courses in its initial phase, BU plans to commence postgraduate studies at Masters and PhD level in September 2004 in association with the University of Edinburgh. ADU, set to be one of the largest private sector universities in the region, will eventually comprise seven colleges. The first three colleges, Business Administration, Education and Computer Science and IT, opened in September 2003.

Knowledge Village (KV), part of Dubai's DTMFZ (see section on Economic Development) is set to expand dramatically the possibilities of third level education in the UAE through its drive to provide an infrastructure for developing, sharing and applying knowledge. Tasked with bringing together a select group of international universities, training centres, e-learning and research and development companies under one roof, KV has already managed to attract some of the leading institutions of the world to its site. Institutions currently signed up to KV include Purdue University, in the US; The Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS), Pilani, ranked amongst the top three engineering colleges in India in 2002; the British University, in association with the University of Edinburgh, offering a postgraduate degree in Informatics; Australia-based University of Wollongong; the International Institute for Technology and Management (IITM), set up to train students in the UAE towards earning qualifications from the University of London (UoL), offered in association with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE); and, most recently, Szabist, Pakistan's premier institute of higher and professional education, which is listed in the world's top business schools by *BusinessWeek* and *AsiaWeek*,

Higher Institute for Legal and Judicial Sciences

The Dh15 million construction of the Higher Institute for Legal and Judicial Sciences by Dubai Municipality will ensure that students need not go abroad in order to pursue their legal studies at postgraduate level. As well as a main building for academic purposes with lecture halls cafeteria, court, prayer room etc, there is also a residential building for students and staff.

Studying Abroad

The number of nationals studying abroad and supported by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research for the year 2003 was 1322. Educational opportunities abroad are both diverse and innovative. A technical training project, run by the UAE Armed Forces, has been operating since 1993. Under the scheme, UAE nationals undergo a period of training abroad and more than 1500 students are currently studying at 50 colleges and universities in Britain and Ireland. The project is yielding a new generation of highly trained technicians for the UAE Armed Forces and the diversity of experience gained complements the experience of those being trained within the country.

Other institutions like the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and ERWDA also provide scholarships for UAE nationals to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate courses overseas.

Online Education

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) academic subject review project has highlighted the UAE as the most advanced e-learning country in the region. The project, which has studied 15 universities from the Arab world, is part of the UNDP's programme on enhancement of quality assurance and institutional planning at Arab universities and aims to help countries in the region share e-learning more effectively. AUST has been selected as the UAE's quality university on computer sciences.

eTQM, (www.etqm.net), the world's first online school of total quality management, is fast becoming a force to be reckoned with in the field of innovative learning. During 2003, the Dubai Internet City-based college organised the first Excellence in Education conference, introducing Lloyds TSB Quality in Education programme to the Arab world – a system of quality evaluation based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). In a drive towards both Arabising learning materials and promoting greater research into under-recognised Arab developments, eTQM signed a MoU with Emerald, the UK-based publishing house. eTQM will translate Emerald publications into Arabic while eTQM students will have online access to more than 40,000 research publications worldwide.

Another online venture offering flexible learning opportunities is UK eUniversities Worldwide (UKeU). The British government-backed online educational service,

which works in partnership with leading UK universities such as Cambridge University, York University and the Open University, has entered into MoUs with the HCT and CERT to provide a variety of purpose-built, quality assured programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level for students and those seeking further professional development.

Universitas 21 Global (U21G), a consortium of 16 leading universities and Asia Pacific's leading online university, has entered into a joint venture with Thomson Learning, offering a two-year MBA programme to professionals who require flexible study opportunities from a new base in Dubai.

Sharjah Institute of Technology

Unfortunately, there are those who slip through the educational net during their childhood. The new Sharjah Institute of Technology, which was opened in September 2003, provides a route to career development for those who did not complete the school curriculum. It is the first vocational institute in the UAE, aiming to teach vocational and professional skills that will meet the market needs of a wide range of industries. Constructed at a cost of Dh80 million, the Institute is run under the supervision of Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority. Students who have completed their ninth grade are eligible for admission. It is open to both nationals and expatriates.

LITERACY

As well as providing free primary and secondary education to children (primary school attendance is compulsory), the UAE provides free primary and secondary education in the Arab curriculum for those adults who missed out on education during their childhood. Here, too, females have been showing themselves more motivated than males. The 2002 Arab Economic Report showed an illiteracy rate at the end of 2000 of 21 per cent for females over 15 years, compared with 26 per cent for males in a similar age category. The UAE leads Arab countries in meeting the goals set by UNESCO's 'Education For All' programme. The overall illiteracy rate in the UAE currently stands at 10 per cent, the elderly being the chief victims, and it is estimated that the nation will achieve full literacy in five years.

LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

EMIRATISATION

At the end of 2002 the UAE's workforce was estimated to be 2.26 million and projected to grow to nearly 2.3 million by the close of 2003. At the official opening of Tanmia's new office in Sharjah in May 2003, Tanmia's director general referred to the anomaly of 'struggling to employ 8000 individuals in a market that provides

around two million job opportunities', particularly given that 50 per cent of those seeking employment hold higher diplomas or degrees. UAE nationals account for only 2 per cent of the total workforce in the private sector, while private sector employment accounts for 52.1 per cent of the total jobs in the country. In 1995, nationals accounted for 9 per cent of the total workforce. Ministry of Planning figures show this percentage to have declined to around 8.6 per cent in 2000 and it is expected to recede to 7.9 per cent by 2005. These are statistics that the government is very anxious to change. Tanmia is urging a more aggressive approach towards the private sector than has hitherto been the case, but, as always in such situations, the problem is complex and incapable of yielding to simple solutions. The private sector has been inadequate in its response to government requests for a change in employment practices – away from its overwhelming reliance on expatriate labour and towards both the hiring and, if necessary, training of nationals. Nationals, on the other hand, in what was one of the key findings of a survey carried out by the Department of Human Resources in Sharjah, have a poor record in matching their qualifications to the demands of the job market, while those who do have relevant degrees are deficient in professional skills and job-oriented training.

It is clearly not in the interests of the UAE's economy to force the private sector to endure a consistently underperforming employee merely because that employee happens to be a national; it is equally clearly not in the national interest to have a private sector which regards itself as having no debt to the country which has been the vehicle of its success. The bulk of nationals work in the public sector and the public sector, already overstaffed, has reached saturation point. It is, therefore, incapable of absorbing the 13,000 to 15,000 nationals predicted to enter the labour market each year until 2010. The need for a faster rate of emiratization is undeniable as the unemployment levels of nationals soar – 300,000 is the overall figure mooted for the year 2006. The figures demonstrate that education is no guarantee of employment: 107,087 secondary school graduates, 47,887 HCT graduates and 22,889 university graduates are expected to be in search of jobs in 2006.

A study of skilled labour opportunities for nationals in the private sector by the Centre for Labour Market Research and Information produced some interesting glimpses of employer perceptions, both in terms of what questions were answered and the responses given. One in 20 of 24,609 larger private sector companies (more than ten employees) were sampled. While the finding that only 7 per cent of firms recruit directly from schools is not surprising, the fact that about half do not recruit directly from either UAE schools, universities or colleges shows an unwarranted underuse of a natural, internal resource. One-third of the companies surveyed recruit up to 10 per cent of their employees from other UAE companies,



but the bulk of companies recruit staff directly from abroad – 20 per cent for half the companies, 50 per cent for one third of them. Only half those sampled bothered to give their views on the employability of graduates from different categories of institutions, and those who did rated the immediate managerial potential of students from foreign universities (24 per cent) more highly than that of students either at UAEU (17 per cent) or at colleges within the HCT (4 per cent) – the latter figure was particularly disappointing. Those interviewed called for increased technical and English language training for nationals, as well as work experience programmes. The training policies of the companies themselves are underdeveloped and disimprove with diminishing company size. Fifty per cent of large (over 500 employees), 35 per cent of medium-sized companies (100–499) and 21 per cent of small companies (less than 100) provide regular staff training. Finance companies have the best training record (57 per cent of all firms provide training), while training in education and health is startlingly low, at 15 per cent.

A common complaint of private sector employers is that nationals have unrealistic expectations regarding their working conditions and never stay long in their jobs. A survey by Tanmia of almost 350 UAE nationals employed in the private sector found that indeed most national workers do not remain in their jobs for more than five years. The survey, which covered the 20–29 age group, revealed that about 35 per cent of the nearly 350 national employees polled left their jobs within two years while 9.3 per cent spent less than one year in the same institution. But many of those surveyed voiced a sense of discrimination, particularly in terms of promotion – there was a perception that nationals were being denied essential training, and therefore the chance to be considered for promotion, by foreign employees who feared for their own jobs should a national become capable of replacing them.

As part of the government's strategy for fulfilling the job needs of their highly-educated nationals, banks are required to set aside 30 per cent of available jobs for nationals. At the beginning of 2003, the Central Bank warned that banks would not be able to open new branches if they failed to raise their emiratization levels by 4 per cent. Despite a finding by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs earlier this year that some banks are still not abiding by the emiratization rate and are failing to give adequate training to those whom they have employed, employment statistics provided by the Human Resources Development Committee show the strategy to have been a great success. UAE banking staff increased by 14 per cent from early 1997 to the end of 2002. The total number of banking employees in the same period rose from 13,615 to 15,848, of which the number of national employees increased from 1278 to 3700 in the same period, up from 9.38 per cent to 23.3 per cent in all banks operating in the country. The number of nationals in senior managerial positions rose from 162 in 1997 to 292 by the

end of 2000, an increase of 80.2 per cent, while the number of those in middle managerial positions rose from 315 to 716, up by 127.3 per cent. The number of nationals in lower managerial positions increased from 609 to 2654, or 335.8 per cent.

The insurance sector is likely to be the next target for government attention. A report by the Planning and Follow Up Committee for recruiting nationals in the insurance sector showed that from 1997 to the end of 2002 the number of nationals in that sector rose from 1 per cent to 5 per cent. The government would like to see that figure increase to at least 15 per cent.

One reason for the reluctance of nationals to work in the private sector is the unsociable working hours encountered. Local authorities are, therefore, considering the imposition of an eight-hour shift for the insurance industry to replace the current two-shift regime, together with a five-day week, to bring the insurance sector in line with the public sector. Such changes, combined with a minimum range of salary packages to be offered to nationals, are expected to enhance the sector's appeal to the career oriented young national.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Tanmia are to join forces in an effort to boost the job prospects of nationals. The two bodies have agreed to the formation of joint programmes in training and development and the promotion of entrepreneurial enterprises, especially in the area of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The ILO will offer financial and technical support for these programmes and Tanmia will benefit from the ILO's programmes, especially those benefiting women and rural areas with small populations. Tanmia is also considering the establishment of a joint stock company to assist nationals attempting to start businesses.

Careers UAE 2003

Careers UAE 2003, a careers event, organised by DWTC in conjunction with the HCT, Tanmia and ZU, closed at Dubai Airport Expo on a highly positive note, having doubled the number of exhibitors from 58 at the previous fair to 117 in 2003. Of those exhibitors, 38 per cent were from the private sector, 17 per cent came from the banking industry, while the remainder represented the semi-state and state sector. The event, which brings together national jobseekers, students and potential employers, has become a major driving force in the move towards greater emiratization. One of its successes has been in raising awareness within the public and private sector organisations, not just about the importance of emiratization but also about the enormous pool of talent available to fill many the UAE's employment demands. More than 14,000 jobseekers and visitors attended the fair, a huge increase over last year's approximately 9000 visitors. Most participating companies reported collecting an average of 40–50 CVs per day and the general consensus among potential employers was that the quality of prospective candidates had improved tremendously since the careers fair first began.

SOCIAL WELFARE

Despite the UAE's economic success, there are, inevitably, individuals who cannot benefit from the country's good fortune and a welfare system exists to assist those burdened by intractable problems and to help the vulnerable to realise their full potential as productive members of society. In July 1999, the Federal National Council approved new legislation regulating social security benefits. Under the law, those entitled to monthly social benefits include national widows and divorced women, the disabled and the handicapped, the aged, orphans, single daughters, married students, relatives of jailed dependants, estranged wives and insolvents. Also eligible for social security benefits are widowed and divorced national women previously married to foreigners and expatriate husbands of UAE national women. In 2003, approximately Dh660 million was distributed among 77,000 beneficiaries of social welfare in the UAE – the elderly accounting for the largest group of recipients (12,000), followed by divorcees (5000). The Social Security Department at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs plans to reduce that number by 1800 by setting up suitable UAE nationals with jobs or small businesses and is inviting charitable and social organisations to contribute to the funding of this innovative project. While the number of those receiving assistance has dropped between 1980 and 2003, from 83,076 to the current 77,000, the cost to the government has risen by 16 per cent per head.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs also disbursed a total of Dh1.9 million in domestic relief aid during 2003 compared to about Dh2.6 in 2002. The bulk of assistance, about Dh1.567 million or 80.1 per cent of the total, went to victims of fire accidents, followed by boat capsizing incidents with Dh310,194 or 8.58 per cent, and other catastrophes with Dh78,625.

Social Welfare Associations

Non-government social welfare associations (of which there are more than 100) also assist those in need in the UAE. An analysis of social welfare associations carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs showed their total earnings from fund-raising activities during 2002 to have reached Dh340 million. The total expenditure of these associations was more than Dh268 million and government subsidies accounted for Dh6,790,000.

The UAE Red Crescent Society is prominent among the many charitable organisations that help the needy in the UAE. (See Foreign Aid for an account of the Red Crescent Society's work outside of the country.) During 2002, the Red Crescent started two new branches in Sharjah and Ajman, as well as opening the Humanitarian Logistic Centre in Jebel Ali Free Zone and launching a website (www.uaerc.org). The cost of its humanitarian programmes and charity projects executed inside the country during 2002 was Dh38,481,354, covering such areas



as medical aid, student sponsorship, disability, special care, health care programmes, prisoner care and lump sum aid programmes.

The Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation finances projects with precise objectives to benefit large communities both within the UAE and overseas. It does not distribute financial resources to individuals or groups. Within the UAE, the charity has spent more than Dh120 million on major projects and about Dh57 million in contributions.

Eighty per cent of The Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation's budget of Dh25 million in 2003 was allocated to projects within the UAE. The Foundation's domestic programmes concentrate on education, medical treatment, monthly or one-time assistance, food coupons, training courses and housing.

The Bait Al Khair Charity Society, established in 1989, was recently awarded ISO 9001:2000 certification, becoming only the second charitable and humanitarian society to receive this award in the Middle East, the first being the Zayed Charitable Foundation. The Society provides assistance to poor students and emergency aid to those who have been hit by catastrophes. It also works with other charity organisations to ensure that the needy get the best of help. The Society spent Dh27 million on its projects during 2002.

Other organisations include the women's associations in each emirate (see section on Women), charity associations in Sharjah, Fujairah and Dubai, Ajman Care Society, Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services, the Handicapped Guardians Association and Taryam Omran Establishment for Cultural and Humanitarian Services.

WOMEN

As the UAE Government forges ahead with its policy of emiratization in an economic climate in which knowledge dependent sectors are of paramount importance, women are seen as being more and more crucial to its success. Nationals comprise only about 25 per cent of the UAE's total population and 57 per cent of those are under the age of 20. Given not only that women constitute more than half of those continuing on to higher education, but that females are outperforming males at every level of education, it is no longer enough for women to gain a qualification – it is vital that what women choose to do in tertiary education should be relevant to the needs of the ever more technologically challenging workplace.

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

Despite the high levels of education achieved by women in the UAE, the ratio of male to female participation in the workforce remains low. Ministry of Planning

figures for 2002 show that out of a total labour force of 2.26 million, women comprise only 14.1 per cent and the bulk of those work in the public sector. According to the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), the UAE had the lowest percentage of female workers among Arab countries in 2000. There are several reasons for such low percentage figures. Firstly, the male population (2.54 million) far exceeds the female population (1.2 million); secondly, some companies restrict the numbers of females employed in favour of males; thirdly, UAE society is patriarchal and the changing of traditional views concerning a woman's place in the family is a slow process.

Yet, role models for women are multiplying in the UAE. Whether her skills lie in the direction of finance, IT, the arts, medicine, engineering, police work or the social sciences, the contemporary UAE woman is assured of finding herself following in the footsteps of pioneering predecessors. According to official figures, UAE women comprise 41.5 per cent of all employees in education, 34.2 per cent in the health sector and 19.7 per cent in social affairs. Women account for nearly 28 per cent of civil servants in 24 federal ministry departments while women total 57 per cent of nationals working in the banking and financial services sector (and 39.3 per cent of all women employed in the sector).

As Director of Dubai Women's College (DWC) Dr Howard Reed points out, the type of position being obtained by DWC graduates indicates a shift in employment expectations on both sides. About 65 per cent of HCT female graduates are currently employed and employers such as Citibank, British Bank, Emirates Bank International, Mashreq Bank (70 per cent of UAE women employed in banking are graduates), EPPCO, Emirates, Dubai Municipality, Dubai Economics Department, Dubai Health Department and Etisalat are seeking more graduates. The formerly unprecedented is gradually becoming the norm. Female police officers throughout the Emirates are working in all aspects of police work from administration and computer expertise to traffic control and prison work, while 35 female officers from Dubai's Police Force underwent a rigorous month's training in VIP protection (including marksmanship, abseiling and 'rappelling' – scaling down skyscrapers on a harness!). This year the first women to receive full training in cargo and passenger control graduated from Dubai Civil Aviation Centre's airport security course. A unit of six female firefighters, initially trained for the Dubai Shopping Festival, are set to become a permanent feature of the Civil Defence. Three women have been appointed to the board of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a national woman is Vice-President of Distribution at Dubai Bank, another heads the Social Service at the Primary Health Centre of the Department of Health and Medical Services and the first national endocrinologist is a woman. Hafsa Al Ulama who was voted Emirates Woman of the Year 2002 for her achievement in climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa is, unsurprisingly, Vice-President of Citibank UAE

and the first woman to reach that stage. Amongst 23 new UAE diplomats sworn in by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs were eight women.

Nevertheless, gender inequality remains a problem. *Abu Dhabi Economy* reports that women account for less than 15 per cent of the Emirate's businesses and those businesses are mainly in women-oriented sectors. The government, in attempting to create a level playing field for women, must contend with patriarchal attitudes both in the workplace and within family structures.

A study conducted by two female graduates of the American University of Sharjah (AUS) shows gender discrimination to be a persistent factor in the UAE workplace. A questionnaire was distributed to more than 100 men and women, while eight leading professional women were interviewed. The study showed the workplace to be a hostile environment for a female, where she is viewed by male colleagues as too emotional, incompetent, and incapable of leadership. One of those interviewed stressed the necessity for management within individual companies to have an explicit policy on equal promotional opportunities for men and women and to ensure that equality of opportunity includes equal access to training and equal opportunities to demonstrate individual competence.

The creation, two years ago, of the Professional Women's Sub Group at Dubai Quality Group to create business and professional awareness among the women in the UAE, through such means as career advisory meetings and the sharing of best practices, was a move in that direction. The sub group's ongoing efforts to establish a crisis centre for women is another means whereby the problems encountered by women in the workplace will be thrown into stark relief.

EMIRATES BUSINESSWOMEN AWARD

A new and significant measure of excellence, the Emirates Businesswomen Award (EBA), was created by Shell Dubai and Northern Emirates in association with the Dubai Quality Group. The award honours outstanding women in the professional and business arena through a stringently devised points system based on five parameters: visionary leadership, future goals, professional achievements, career achievements and community contribution. At the awards ceremony in March 2003, Salwa Saleh Saeed Ali Shaibani, president and CEO of Condor Medical Waste Management, won the business owner/investor category and Habiba Hassan Al Marashi, chairperson of Emirates Environmental Group, was winner of the professional category.

According to Hussain Al Mahmoudi, Manager External Affairs, Shell Markets (Middle East), 'The UAE is certainly taking the lead in laying a definitive framework to bring more women in the spotlight as achievers and doers. Educational incentives are supported by guidance and placement, as well as capital to build own businesses'. Statistics demonstrate that the strategy is bearing fruit. Dubai recorded 3223

businesswomen (55 per cent of whom are UAE nationals) in 2002, a five-fold increase in the last decade, while Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, with 1325, registered a four-fold increase over the same period. Of the businesswomen operating in Dubai, approximately 40.5 per cent are owners, 48.1 per cent partners and 11.45 per cent managing partners. Around 48 per cent are engaged in trade, 42 per cent in vocational activities, 9.6 per cent in professional services and 0.3 per cent in industrial businesses.

ABU DHABI BUSINESSWOMEN GROUP

The Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Group (ADBW), a group under the umbrella of the National Businesswomen's Committee (NBC), is implementing three major projects in cooperation with educational and trading partners. One is the education and training of potential female entrepreneurs in collaboration with ZU and the HCT. A second – 'Employment Passport' – provides an opportunity for graduates to gain work experience in companies and businesses run by the members of the ADBW. In addition, it is drawing up a plan of financial support for the business proposals of a small selection of promising young nationals.

UNESCO CHAIR

The region's first UNESCO Chair in Communication Technology and Journalism for Women (and the first UNESCO Chair devoted solely to women) was inaugurated at Dubai Women's College (DWC) with the mission of promoting professional education and training for journalists, and having a special interest in enabling women to develop careers in the media throughout the Arab region. DWC hopes to have an annual Women's Documentary Film Festival, a Women's Journalist of the Year Award, and an international conference on women in the media. Linked as it is with UNESCO, the Chair is envisaged as being an 'international centre of excellence in communication' serving 'as a focal point for a pan Arab network in the field'.

THE GENERAL WOMEN'S UNION

Since the formation in 1972 of the Abu Dhabi Women's Society, women's groups have been a cohesive and self-empowering force in UAE society. Similar societies were rapidly established in almost every emirate and, today, the six societies boast 31 branches between them. The General Women's Union (GWU) (originally the UAE Women's Federation) was established in 1975 under the leadership of Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, wife of the UAE President, with the aim of bringing together under one umbrella all the women's societies in the country. The GWU since its inception has brought to the fore many interrelated issues of concern for women, children and the family and has been instrumental in introducing handicraft, health education and literacy programmes throughout the UAE. It has

offered vocational training, job placement services, family mediation services and religious education.

As the needs of women have developed alongside their educational development, so the range and focus of the GWU's concerns and expertise have developed. In December 2002, the formulation of a National Strategy for the Advancement of Women was announced in a joint initiative between the GWU, UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), local government agencies and NGOs. The strategy's purpose is 'to activate the role of women and their positive participation in eight major and significant fields, including education, economy, information, social work, health, legislature and environment, in addition to political and executive fields'. A key recommendation is for businesswomen's councils to be attached to each of the chambers of commerce and industry throughout the UAE. The effect of the strategy is to raise the debate on female participation to a new level with a rhetoric that unapologetically assumes gender equality and focuses on the removal of obstacles to that participation.

The GWU was instrumental in ensuring the establishment of the Higher Council for Maternity and Childhood. The Council, whose chairmanship is open to the Chairwoman of the GWU, is tasked with drawing up and supervising the implementation of strategies for the development of the mother and child under the national development plan. It also has responsibility for educating public opinion on matters concerning the mother and child and is to organise research on maternity and childhood, set up a database centre and encourage professional establishments to carry out projects targeting mothers and children's educational, health, cultural and social well-being. An important function for the Council is the creation of training programmes to improve skills of staff in the public, private and voluntary agencies and foundations.

Sheikha Fatima's efforts to gain access for women to the state's highest political and constitutional institutions are gradually creating conditions for change to take place. Although no women were included in the list of members appointed to the Federal National Council (FNC) in January 2003, representatives of the FNC and the GWU began a series of meetings in June 2003 to discuss plans for UAE women to join the Council and representatives from the FNC paid their first visit to GWU headquarters.

Although the UAE is among 55 countries ranked high on the UN Human Development Index (HDI), it has, in the Human Development Report for 2003, fallen from forty-sixth to forty-eighth place. It has also fallen from first to fourth place in GCC rankings. The slippage is due, according to the UNDP, to the decrease in the number of students in primary schools and the absence of women in politics.

The GWU maintains strong Arab and international links with women's organisations and is affiliated to the Arab Women's Federation, the International

Women's Federation and the International Family Organisation. The Gulf Committee for Regional Coordination of Women's Work has chosen Abu Dhabi as its permanent headquarters and 2002 heralded the beginning of the UAE's four-year term of membership of the Women's Committee of the 54-member UN Economic Council. Also in 2002, the GWU was a joint organiser of the Arab Women and Media Forum. In November 2004, Abu Dhabi is to host the third Arab Women's Conference.

ATHENA AWARD

In March 2003, Sheikha Fatima became the eleventh recipient of the Athena Award, the highest award bestowed by the International Athena Foundation. She was chosen by the adjudicators of this prestigious award (created in the US in 1982 to honour women worldwide who work for the empowerment of women) for her excellence under three criteria: professional excellence, dedication to others, and her impact on women throughout the UAE and beyond.

MARRIAGE

Despite the preponderance of males in the UAE, it was recognised in the early 1990s that growing numbers of UAE women were not getting married. One of the main causes of this problem, which had escalating social consequences, was the high cost of marriage. A dowry system is traditional to the UAE and, as the country's wealth soared, dowry expectations soared with equal rapidity, making marriage unviable for many young men and their families. The price of wedding celebrations themselves had spiralled out of control, a further financial disincentive to any couple contemplating marriage. The Marriage Fund was set up in 1992 to combat the problems experienced by nationals wishing to marry. Marriage halls where mass marriages can take place were built to facilitate more economical ceremonies and the government launched a campaign calling for a reduction in dowry size. Since then, an upper limit of Dh50,000 has been placed on dowry size and the prohibition on extravagant weddings can be enforced by legal sanctions: a prison sentence or a Dh500,000 fine for the couples concerned. To date, 12 marriage halls have been built in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain. Four more halls are to be constructed in Sharjah.

Young UAE nationals with limited incomes (recently increased from Dh13,000 to Dh16,000 per month) wishing to marry can apply to the Fund for a marriage grant of up to Dh60,000 (recently reduced from Dh70,000), usually paid in two instalments. Many couples are participating in mass weddings such as that which took place at the Sharjah Expo Centre in July 2003, when 28 couples tied the knot. Forty mass weddings have been held since the Fund's establishment in 1992 and around 2000 nationals have benefited from them. The Marriage Fund receives between 4500 and 5000 grant applications every year, up substantially from the initial figure of 2036 in 1993.

The Marriage Fund plans to hold orientation courses on disputes for couples in trouble and has developed a hotline for nationals to help solve their marital problems. National couples wishing to obtain the marriage grant will first have to undergo a pre-marriage counselling course, 'Getting to know your other Half'.

In a further effort to counteract the damaging effects of the rising divorce rate, UAE University (UAEU) is undertaking the first comprehensive study of divorce following an agreement with the Marriage Fund which will provide funding of Dh860,000 for the project – 'The Divorce Phenomenon in the UAE: Its Reasons and Proposed Solutions'.

HEALTH

World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics show the UAE to be in twenty-seventh place in a major analysis of national healthcare systems in 191 member countries. The parameters used for the survey included the overall health of the population, distribution of health care in the population, responsiveness of the healthcare system, including patient satisfaction, opinions of people belonging to different economic strata about the system and how the services were paid for by the population. The finding reflects the success of the UAE's dynamic drive towards providing a world-class health service for its population.

In 1971 UAE health infrastructure was limited to seven hospitals with 700 beds and 12 health centres. Today, the Ministry of Health (MoH) runs 26 public hospitals, with a total bed capacity of 4100, of which 22 are general. Two psychiatric hospitals are located in Abu Dhabi and Dubai with 157 and 80 beds respectively, while Abu Dhabi also has a 104-bed hospital dedicated to rehabilitation. There is a 40-bed TB hospital in Al Ain. In addition to these hospitals, 13 other governmental medical establishments exist, including a police hospital and an army hospital. Central to the government's strategy of bringing health care to the people are the 106 Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) with a total staff of 2267. There are 169 government pharmacies (manned by 181 pharmacists and 624 assistant pharmacists) operating throughout the seven emirates.

The MoH's Annual Report for 2002 lists a total of 2304 consultants, specialists and GPs, of whom 909 are female. The majority of both males (766) and females (688) practice as GPs. Females account for 181 of 622 specialists, with gynaecologists and paediatricians comprising the largest female groupings. Women account for 40 of the 228 consultants working in public health care. Of the 228 dentists working in 92 dental clinics, exactly half are women.

The MoH is undertaking a Dh450 million programme to provide new health facilities in the seven emirates. Five hospitals are to be built – a psychiatric hospital



in Dubai (Dh40 million), an obstetric and paediatric hospital in Sharjah (Dh50 million), and general hospitals in Kalba (Dh90 million) in Umm al-Qaiwain and Ra's al-Khaimah (Dh50 million each). In addition, ten medical centres are to be built in Jumairah, Hor al-Anz, Sharjah, Ajman, Ra's al-Khaimah, Umm al-Qaiwain and Fujairah, costing approximately Dh46 million, and four units and clinics will be added to existing health institutions at a cost of Dh67 million. Two hospitals, Rashid and Dubai, are to be enlarged, and construction of the region's first disaster centre, costing Dh45 million, is scheduled to commence at Rashid Hospital in early 2004. Staff have already undergone the specialised resuscitation training required for the running of such a unit.

A new state-of-the-art general hospital, Al Rahba, opened in Abu Dhabi as part of the General Health Authority for the Health Services (GHAS) strategy to upgrade health services in the capital and its outlying areas. The hospital, which has 84 beds (to be increased to 143) and offers a special trauma unit for coping with accident victims, includes as part of its remit the provision of a homecare and home follow-up service, the first of its kind in the UAE. The MoH is also to invest Dh4 million in upgrading research facilities and training medical staff in various medical fields at its government hospitals and medical centres.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

As part of its policy to encourage the involvement of the private sector in health care, the MoH has approved the construction of five new private hospitals to be built over the next two years throughout the UAE (two apiece in Abu Dhabi and Sharjah and one in Al Ain).

Belhoul Apollo Hospital, estimated to have cost Dh120 million and offering advanced tertiary care, was opened in January 2003. The 60-bed complex is part of the Apollo Hospitals Group, the largest corporate hospital chain in Asia and India. In Sharjah, the 160-bed Royal Hospital, estimated to cost Dh110 million, promising affordable care and set to be the largest private hospital in the region, will have two sections – one for the general public, the other for VIPs.

A teaching hospital, specialising in the treatment of chronic and incurable diseases, is to be built adjacent to Dubai Medical College for Girls. The hospital will have three sections – alternative medicine, modern medicine and medical research.

DUBAI HEALTHCARE CITY

Scheduled for completion in 2010, but likely to be finished sooner, Dubai Healthcare City (DHCC) is a visionary enterprise which is already transforming Dubai into the healthcare hub of the region and further afield. A 300-bed university hospital, medical college (an initial intake of 50 students is planned for 2004), nursing school for 300 students, a life sciences research centre, 40 fully equipped, ready-to-go clinics

(to be offered on both leasehold and freehold terms) and specialised laboratories are to be eased into the 4.1 million square feet former site of the Global Village, situated in the vicinity of the existing hospitals, Al Wasl, Rashid, the American Hospital and Welcare. All required documentation for both doctors and patients will be handled by DHCC's administrative section. Naturally, any prospective tenants or purchasers will have to meet existing medical regulations set by the Dubai Department of Health and Medical Services (DOHMS), in addition to the DHCC's own quality criteria. Construction work for the first phase is likely to be completed in the first quarter of 2004. Such has been the degree of interest in the enterprise that a further site of 10 million square feet has been proposed to allow for the expansion of the healthcare city. Key to the success of the development is the agreement between DHCC and Harvard Medical School to form a joint venture in medical education and training, quality assurance, knowledge management, research and strategic planning. The Harvard Postgraduate Medical Education Programme will start in 2005, initially covering cardiology, oncology, orthopaedics and gastroenterology, while continuing education programmes are expected to begin before the first phase of construction has been completed. In a separate development, the Mayo Clinic has entered into a strategic partnership with DHCC to open a clinic in the complex. Mayo physicians will provide medical care on site and the partnership will include cooperation in medical care, professional consultancy and research.

CHILDCARE

The success of the MoH's pre- and post-natal service, carried out at primary healthcare centres distributed throughout the country, is reflected not just in the low levels of infant mortality of 6.57 per 1000, a figure in line with that of other developed countries, but also in the very low level of maternal mortality (one in 100,000), a rate below that in many developed countries.

The recently initiated Neonatal Resuscitation Programme (NRP) is expected to result in a further reduction in infant mortality rates. Since its launch in 1987 in the US, the NRP has been taught to more than a million providers. Now the UAE has joined the ranks of countries benefiting from its training on how to handle the crucial first minutes of life for a baby born in critical condition. The first batch of instructors completed their training at Tawam Hospital and these instructors are now installed in six hospitals around the country.

Seen as a crucial health right of infants and their mothers, breastfeeding has the strong support of the UAE's MoH which first introduced a breastfeeding promotion programme in 1992 (a 1998 MoH survey showed that 98.7 per cent of newborns were breastfed in that year, compared with 67 per cent in 1992). One of the most influential initiatives of the international breastfeeding programme is the

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI). Participating hospitals (there are currently 19 hospitals signed up to the initiative in the UAE of which six are fully accredited) do not permit anything other than breast milk to be fed to infants except in cases of medical necessity.

The school system is used as the basis for continuing primary care. Clinics established in each school carry out periodical health checks, including regular dental inspections, in addition to administering the continuing vaccination schedule.

PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

In December 2002 the UAE was declared free of malaria, an announcement which was a tribute to the health service's disease control programmes, following its previous success in eradicating polio. To come from a total number of cases of malaria among UAE nationals of 30 per cent in 1980 to 1.6 per cent in 2000 was in itself a magnificent achievement (malaria transmission within the UAE ceased in 1997 due to the programme of early detection and surveillance), but the elimination of that final 1.6 per cent showed the tenacity which has been the hallmark of the health service's efforts to eliminate a disease which continues to ravage other countries in the Middle East where malaria infects 15 million people a year and causes 47,000 deaths. The health service will remain vigilant in order to keep the hard-won malaria-free status and will continue its efforts to eradicate other communicable diseases – its next ambition is the elimination of measles by the year 2005. This year, the MoH put in train a plan to vaccinate all school children, visiting the homes of those children who have not yet been vaccinated and vaccinating them there. Tuberculosis is another disease targeted by the MoH for eradication. There are currently somewhere between five and ten cases per 100,000 of the population. Three new vaccines, anti-tetanus, diphtheria and chicken pox, are being added to the vaccination programme administered through the school system by the School Health Department of the MoH.

A screening programme for breast cancer has been launched to cover all women aged over 40 years. A similar programme is planned for the detection of cervical cancer, and screening activities are currently conducted on an ad hoc basis in some of the country's maternity hospitals. Programmes for the early detection of colorectal and prostate cancer are expected to be in place by 2005.

A national programme has already proved its effectiveness as a tool in the early detection of congenital and hereditary diseases and the Department of Preventive Medicine is in the process of establishing a Hereditary Disease Clinic in Sharjah in collaboration with the central Department of Maternal and Child Health.

Diabetes is a disease which is on the increase worldwide and its prevalence is causing headaches for healthcare providers everywhere. It is estimated that about 24 per cent of the UAE's population suffers from diabetes (a leading endocrinologist

predicts that this figure will rise to 50 per cent by 2005). Studies carried out by Al Mafraq Hospital and WHO show the percentage of diabetes sufferers over 60 to be as high as 40 per cent, and the MoH has undertaken a series of educational measures to raise awareness of the problem. Through the Visiting Doctors Programme, leading endocrinologists have been brought in to educate local doctors, nurses and dieticians on the prevention, identification and management of the disease. A two-day international symposium on diabetes mellitus organised by GAHS took place in January 2003. A further conference took place in May, hosted by Gulf Medical College in cooperation with the MoH and Emirates Medical Organisation, to discuss ways of combating and treating the growing problem. A 'Fun Run 2003' was organised by Tawam Hospital, Abu Dhabi GAHS, the HCT and Al Jimi shopping centre to highlight the disease.

Tobacco

Although the UAE is ranked seventh in the world tobacco trading index, 80 per cent of tobacco imports are re-exported to other countries in the region. Tobacco is, nevertheless, a huge problem for healthcare officials and major information drives have been undertaken at government level to educate the public on the adverse effects of smoking. The MoH supports World No Tobacco Day and Arab Anti-Tobacco Day and launches periodic public awareness campaigns on the health, economic, social and cultural consequences of tobacco use. Smoking cessation units providing counselling and treatment have been established in each emirate by the preventive medicine department. Of particular concern to the department is the rising number of teenagers who smoke. A school-based survey of 4178 grade 7–10 adolescents (2112 from government schools and 2066 from private schools) as part of a Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS), carried out by the MoH in 2002, revealed that one in five students had smoked and that of those who smoked, one in four had first done so before the age of ten. It showed smoking to be predominantly a male problem – more than four times as many males as females currently smoked cigarettes, though only twice as many males as females smoked some other form of tobacco. The same survey revealed that one in ten non-smokers and three in ten current smokers were, in a 30-day period, offered free cigarettes by a tobacco company representative. Less than half of all students (46.1 per cent) had been taught at school about the dangers of smoking in the previous year (one-third of current smokers compared to one-tenth of non-smokers did not know that smoking was a health hazard). More than 25 per cent of non-smokers and more than 60 per cent of current smokers reported being exposed to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) in their homes and in public places and of current smokers, 58 per cent were unaware of the danger posed to their health by ETS. Currently, tobacco companies must display a health warning, nicotine and tar contents on cigarette packets; smoking is banned on the two national

airlines; tobacco advertisements are banned on national television; taxation on tobacco has been increased to 100 per cent; smoking is banned in the Ministries of Health and Education, while in Sharjah emirate, smoking is not permitted in government offices generally.

BLOOD AND BLOOD PRODUCTS

A new Dh15 million blood transfusion research centre in Sharjah housing the Blood Transfusion Services Department makes the UAE one of the leading blood research units in the Middle East with laboratories for serology, haematology and virology. The Centre has the capacity to take blood from 20 donors every five minutes – a rate of extraction which can be increased to 40 in an emergency situation – and provides blood to 22 public and private health institutions in the UAE. It collects 35,000 units in the UAE annually and hopes to increase the rate to 40,000 for 2003. Sharjah is already a recognised centre in the field of blood treatment and research. A new machine, costing an estimated Dh420,000, for the centre's blood processing laboratory makes the UAE one of only ten countries in the world to utilise gamma radiation for blood sterilisation procedures. A pioneering technique already being used by Sharjah experts is the extraction of blood cells from umbilical cords for use in the treatment of patients with leukaemia and thalassaemia. The Centre is also engaged in the development of tests to determine the level of red blood cells in human and chicken blood.

The UAE ceased the import of blood in 1983 and has relied on local donors ever since. A new mobile blood bank was donated to the Blood Transfusion Service by 20 private companies, led by BP. The 40-foot vehicle will enable the collection of blood throughout the country, and will be used to run blood collection campaigns and to provide educational services as well. The addition of the new bus will greatly expand the capabilities of the existing mobile service, which has, since the donation of the original mobile unit in 1995, organised more than 165 campaigns.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

A federal law was passed in 1995 to regulate the sale and use of herbal medicines, but with the rapid increase in popularity of herbal remedies in the UAE (the total number of imported herbal medicines increased four-fold between 2000 and 2001, with nationals 17 times more likely to avail of herbal treatments than non-nationals), comprehensive regulation in the field of alternative medicine and the establishment of regional harmonisation of regulations and standards is now of prime importance. The MoH has set up an Office of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (OCAM) with two committees – one to draw up rules and conditions governing the licensing of complementary and alternative practitioners (by mid-2003, only 89 of 400 candidates examined had been issued with licences), the other to evaluate alternative medicine degrees. The four specialities so far licensed are: homeopathy, osteopathy,

chiropractic and naturopathy. Under new regulations, herbal mixtures being sold at herbal medical centres must be prescribed by doctors and registered by the MoH. Pharmacists and assistant pharmacists working in such centres must be licensed to practice by the Ministry.

The Zayed Complex for Herbal Research and Traditional Medicine was established in 1996 and as well as conducting research on more than 900 herbs and plants (many of which occur in the UAE) it treats patients suffering from chronic illnesses. In recognition of its success in producing, on a small scale, seven internationally standardised herbal medicines for the treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, joint inflammation, and ulcers, WHO named the complex as a regional centre for alternative medicine in the Middle East. The Complex is on the verge of creating an anti-microbial vaccine from camel's milk that may prove effective in combating both viral and bacterial infections.

NURSING

One area in which UAE nationals are very under-represented is the nursing profession. Although five new nursing schools have been opened, very few of those enrolled are local women. The UAE's first nursing association, Emirates Nursing Association, has been formed in an attempt to rectify the situation. In 2003, the MoH surveyed secondary school students to gauge the level of interest in the nursing profession amongst teenagers. It plans to open more institutes of nursing based on the response to the survey. Nursing salary scales are currently under review and the profession's first nursing journal, *Abu Dhabi Nurse*, was launched in June 2003 by the Abu Dhabi General Authority for Health Services (GAHS).

The UAE was one of 50 countries, and the first in the WHO East Mediterranean Region, to participate in a 'Leadership for Change' programme organised by UAE's Federal Department of Nursing in cooperation with WHO and the Geneva-based International Council of Nurses (ICN). Now in its second year, the series of workshops is developing the leadership and management skills of nurses and other healthcare professionals.

HEALTH INSURANCE

The MoH hopes that within a year, social health insurance will be operating as a compulsory alternative to private health insurance. The scheme (being devised with advice from experts from WHO), which will apply to all residents, regardless of age, nationality or gender, will be managed by an independent body, acting in coordination with the MoH, and the body will buy services from public and private health facilities with 16 insurance companies acting as agents for both sides. Premiums are to range between Dh800 and Dh1300 (though these premiums were fixed in 2000 and may be subject to change), depending on the level of service for which the consumer requires insurance.