

US, UK Universities Still First Preference for UAE Students

DUBAI — With UK and US higher education providers ruling the recently published list of top 200 universities in the world, they continue to be the most desirable study options among students in the UAE this year, even if they are not the most affordable.

Among the top universities published by Times Higher Education – QS World University Rankings, Harvard University ranks number 1, followed by University of Cambridge, Yale University, University College London and Imperial College London.

The list compiled from responses by academicians, employers, and faculty and student analysis.

“For UAE nationals there is definitely a trend of going to the US for higher education whereas among expatriates, UK is a popular destination,” said Sanjeev Verma, director of Intelligent Partners, an education consultancy in Dubai.

Over 700 UAE nationals received government scholarship this year to study overseas.

“For nationals, culture and security are main factors for the destination of study whereas expatriates weigh their options based on university rankings, currency exchange, perceptions and career advancements,” he said.

The British Embassy in the UAE has issued 2,838 student visas between September 2008 and 2009, the vast majority of them to UAE and Indian citizens.

Outstanding grades, coupled with a degree in higher education from the UK, is the formula for success according to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), 11 A star achiever Abhinav Mathur of the Wellington International School in Dubai.

His achievement in this year’s examination has increased his confidence of securing a seat at a top UK university. “They are better renowned,” he said.

“Once you graduate from there, a good job is guaranteed.” Mathur is planning to study medicine at either the University of Edinburgh that has been ranked 20.

Dubai Scholars top achiever Andrew Chetcuti has decided to study in the US. He knows the competition to get into a top US university will be tough but this 8 A star student said he wants to join a university that allows his to pursue his passion for swimming.

“I am in the multi-national team and want to be a part of the 2012 Olympics as well,” he said.

“My choice of university is based on how well the course matches my needs and careers — and swimming is an important part.”

His choice of university ranks 19 in the Times Higher Education list. Currently there are 905 UAE students are enrolled in higher education courses in the US.

A study by The International Graduate Insight Group of more than 11,000 students in 143 countries concluded that respondents who considered themselves to be among the brightest in their peer group were the most likely to study abroad.

The study also shows that two-thirds of students choose the institution rather than a country first when deciding where to study.

This year, schools affiliated to the British curriculum received glowing results in secondary school examinations with students striving to be better than their counterparts in the UK.

Students at schools in the GEMS group achieved scores 25 per cent points above the UK national average. Even the Dubai College excelled with a pass rate of 86.1 per cent placing the school in the premier division of the UK league table.

However, the high cost of education and tighter visa rules could make students spurn international destinations for education fear university representatives abroad.

In April, the UK government established the point-based system for international students applying for study visas.

Students are now expected to show that they can afford their tuition fees 28 days before they apply and must be able to show at least Dh3,500 in living expenses in a bank account.

Jackie Colton, UK Border Agency Operations Manager, Iran and Gulf States, said it's inevitable that there will be practical issues to resolve initially since it has been the biggest change in the system in over 40 years.

"We are committed to making this work; it will provide benefits both for applicants and for visa officers and will give us a simple, objective and transparent system," she said.

Verma said visa rules are nothing more than a financial exercise and bona fide students needn't be deterred by them. "It's a practical rule. You have to show that you have the funds to support yourself and just need to plan in advance."

Students that responded to the international study last year considered both Britain and America the most expensive places in the world to study while the UK's biggest weakness was being the hardest place to find employment after graduation.

"But now with the weakening strength of the pound, many students have opted to study in the UK this year," said Verma.