

**Austrade Education Seminar
Address Downtown, Dubai
Sunday 14 April 2013**

Dr Abdulla Al Karam, Chairman of the Board of Directors and Director General of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority of the Government of Dubai, welcome. Welcome to more than 40 representatives and academics from 18 Australian Universities today who have travelled all the way from Australia and other countries for this event. And apologies because after this speech I will be whisked away to give another speech at a Green Building Seminar which will be going on concurrently in another room here. But I will be back later on.

It goes without saying that education is a key plank in the overall UAE-Australia bilateral relationship.

There are several aspects to this:

1) the presence of UAE students in Australia as international fee-paying or scholarship students;

- 2) the presence of Australian universities and schools in the UAE;
- 3) research and exchange collaboration between Australian and UAE institutions.

On the first point, there are over 1,300 Emirati students in Australia. Many of these students are on some form of UAE Government scholarship. Most are studying for Masters or PhD degrees. Many of them take a liking to Melbourne. We have tried to make things easier for Emirati students e.g. by being able to apply online for a student visa, and by relaxing some of the English language testing requirements for Defence students. We could do better still. Let's face it; the US and the UK are two of our largest competitors in this market. This is a market which places emphasis on government endorsement of private sector activity. I would love to see an Australian Federal Government minister with responsibility for higher education lead a delegation of academics and university officials to the UAE in the future.

Since 2006, at the high school level, Australian schools in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Bendigo have participated in ADEC's Summer Abroad program where ADEC sends Emirati students overseas over the summer break for cultural and educational immersion in another country.

2) In terms of the existence of Australian academic institutions in the UAE, this is a positive. UOWD is the UAE's oldest private university and celebrates its 20th anniversary (established in 1993). It has graduated around 6,000 students over the past 20 years (including around 1,000 Emiratis) and last year formed an alumni association. If I am not mistaken around 3,500 students are enrolled at UOWD at present. Murdoch University is a newer university (five years old) but has a student profile of around 500 and growing.

At the school (primary and secondary level) the two Australian schools in Sharjah have carved out a very strong reputation for themselves and have benefited from the pro-education environment in Sharjah as fostered by the Ruler of Sharjah HH Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi. The Victorian International School of Sharjah and the Australian International School between them

currently enrol around 2,200 students and that number will continue to grow as both schools fill out their roster. Recently both schools ran a highly successful primary school teacher mentoring program on behalf of the Sharjah Education Council and the Ministry of Education, which was given due recognition by His Highness The Ruler.

Of course we would like more Australian schools in the UAE – the demand is certainly outstripping supply at the moment. The right investment conditions need to be met and both our schools in Sharjah have benefited from the generous incentives provided to establish their institutions. There are currently plans to open an Australian private school in Abu Dhabi in the next couple of years.

3) research and exchange collaboration between Australian and UAE institutions. This is an important part of the overall bilateral education relationship and one which is perhaps underplayed. Often the emphasis is on bringing UAE students to Australia and while that is certainly a desirable goal it is not the be-all and end-all in the

relationship. I'm pleased to say that more is happening on that front. In September last year the University of Sydney hosted the Gulf Forum which had research collaboration as one of its main themes, in the areas of food and water security, energy, health, Islamic finance and women in leadership. The Forum and was attended by representatives from 11 Gulf universities and agencies. I am pleased to see that the National Research Foundation is hosting a return visit later this month with an emphasis on biomedical engineering, clean energy, robotics and project leadership.

I also note the National Research Foundation is also in talks with Monash University this week. Monash by the way has an agreement with Fatima College of Health Sciences in Abu Dhabi to provide teacher and curriculum support to the nursing program there, and I know there have been discussions with the newly established Hedayah Centre for Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism for further areas of collaboration, drawing on Australia's experience in southeast Asia. Curtin and Macquarie Universities will be hosting Australia's first international symposium on CVE in November in Perth and we hope to get Hedayah involved in this as well.

Arabic language learning is also another area for further collaboration. I note that the Australian National University has an existing exchange program with Zayed University in Abu Dhabi. Earlier this year, 11 Arabic language students from Canberra were in Abu Dhabi for five weeks as part of their ANU course requirements. I have had discussions with Zayed University and hope that we can expand on those sorts of arrangements - and not just with Zayed University, by the way.

Anyway, these are just a few ideas which it would be interesting to explore further in today's seminar so I wish you all the best in your discussions.