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WORLD BUSINESS



Mideast looks to diversify base

By Ian Grayson for CNN
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(CNN) -- The Middle East, in a desire to expand its economic base from a traditional reliance on oil, is enthusiastically embracing executive education and investing in facilities to drive the sector's growth.

In countries such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, the number of courses on offer is growing strongly. Where once academic resources tended to be focused on engineering and medical studies, now attention is turning to economics and business studies.

European and U.S. business schools are eyeing the untapped potential offered by a pool of experienced and motivated senior managers in the Middle East, and are developing a range of targeted academic options.

An example of the trend can be seen at Knowledge Horizon, a UAE-based education organization charged with fostering relationships with international universities and business schools.

With campus facilities in Dubai, Knowledge Horizon offers a range of executive education courses including an MBA conducted in association with the UK-based Warwick Business School.

The MBA course, offered using distance-learning techniques, is the same as that offered by the university at its UK facility. Participants take part in classroom sessions and have access to library and online resources. Fees for the next course, which starts in October, are \$24,000 and participant numbers are limited to 50.

Knowledge Horizon also has relationships with a number of other educational institutions which provide a range of non-degree executive education courses. These include diplomas in management and teaching from the University of Cambridge and courses from the Institute of Leadership and Management.

Knowledge Horizon managing director Dr Maen Al Qatamin told CNN there are a range of factors driving demand for executive education in the region.

"The recent rises in oil prices, the growth in the stock markets and the influx of multinationals into the region are all raising demand for executives," he says. "We also have many expatriates here who don't want to have to travel to undertake further education."

He says Knowledge Horizon teams with recognized international universities as a way of providing quality assurance for the courses being offered.

Kai Peters, chief executive of Ashridge Business School in the UK, says he is seeing growing demand in the Middle East and the school has established an office in Dubai.



Young women in Baghdad celebrate their graduation from university.

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"About 60 percent of our business is outside the UK at the moment, which can be tricky because you don't want the situation where you have your staff spending all their time on planes," he says. "However, Dubai is close enough so that it doesn't take you 24 hours to get there. This makes it a more practical market for us."

Peters says European business schools are also finding a willing market in the Middle East because there is a growing reluctance on the part of many executives there to travel to the United States.

In response to this perception, U.S.-based business schools are also busy growing their presences in the Middle East region, removing the need for executives to travel.

One example is the American University in Dubai, a branch campus of American InterContinental University based in Atlanta, Georgia. Its school of business offers an MBA course focusing on managing multinational companies, and issues such as international law and monetary policies.

Also, UAE-based Zayed University is increasing its focus on executive and business education and has forged relationships with a range of overseas institutions including the Oklahoma State University, University of Kentucky and Clemson University.

Zayed offers an executive MBA degree course designed around 12 five-week courses conducted over two years. The course costs \$US35,000.

Glasgow-based University of Strathclyde's Graduate School of Business similarly offers its MBA program in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Many other universities are working to establish short and custom courses in other Middle Eastern business centers, having noticed the growing demand among executives in the region.

