

Fast-Track Employment Attracts Top Talents

There's no quicker way for a fresh graduate to join a leading organisation than by enrolling in a fast-track programme.

These employment schemes, which have been sprouting up in the UAE in recent years, are drawing a large number of candidates and enabling companies such as Etihad, du and Microsoft to identify and recruit the very best performers.

Let's face it. Competition in today's job market is inevitable. Multinationals and large organisations in general receive hundreds, if not thousands, of applications every month. But not all doors are closed. Straightforward

recruitment programmes are being launched on a regular basis to take students on board, train them and potentially hire them, depending on their performance.

AWARD-WINNING INITIATIVE

One of the largest such schemes in the UAE is Etihad Airways' Future Leaders, which was awarded the 'Nationalisation Initiative of the Year' at the MENA HR Excellence Awards last year. The program graduated 280 students in October 2015, mainly

Emiratis, and placed them into 200 different careers with the airline. It was the biggest number to pass through the airline's fast-track programme.

The graduating class consisted of 86 cadet pilots, 82 technical engineers, 37 graduate managers, 13 airport operations managers, five sales managers, 53 graduates from Fursati Foundation and four from Etihad's graduate management programme, Sabre. Fursati, operated in partnership with Abu Dhabi Tawteen Council,



Ibrahim Nassir, Chief Human Resources at du



Etihad Airways team at the MENA HR Excellence Awards 2015, including Fatma Al Ali, Head of UAE National Development, Ray Gammell, Chief People and Performance Officer, and Wissam Hachem, VP Learning and Development.

is looking to recruit more than 500 Emiratis in the next two years for entry-level positions with the airline.

‘As a political science graduate, I chose to expand my experience by working in a politically oriented department within Etihad Airways and I joined the Department of Government and Aeropolitical Affairs,’ says Ahmed Al Jeneibi, one of the graduates sponsored by Etihad. ‘I am grateful to Etihad Airways for investing in me and look forward to progressing even further among the airline ranks.’

Etihad already employs more than 2,700 Emiratis across its global operations, and they are currently the number one nationality group in the airline. However, the carrier aims to speed up its employment over the next four years to recruit more than

6,000 nationals by 2020.

‘Etihad Airways is a people business and we need dedicated, hardworking and passionate employees to maintain our position as the world’s leading airline,’ says Ray Gammell, Etihad Airways’ chief people and

Telecom operator du gives the opportunity for UAE nationals every year to continue their education free of charge.



Mohamed Al Mansoori celebrated as Etihad Airways' 2000th Emirati employee by the airline's Emirati workforce

performance officer. "Emiratisation is fundamental to this process and remains the number one priority of the HR division."

A SCHOLARSHIP ROUTE

In the telecommunications industry, du is a role model for fast-track employment, having partnered with the American University in Dubai (AUD) to offer full-time scholarships to Emirati high school graduates and potential jobs thereafter.

Under the Dh5 million agreement that was sealed in 2013, du gives the opportunity for UAE nationals every year to continue their education free of charge, with priority given to high

performers without funds, disabled people, and single parents. The scholarship supports seven bachelor majors, including communications and information studies, interior design, civil engineering, and computer engineering.

"At du, we believe that students are the bedrock for a sustainable knowledge based economy, and providing them with the tools to succeed allows us to make a positive contribution to our country and its people," says Ibrahim Nassir, chief human capital and administration officer at du. "This scholarship offers Emiratis a workplace advantage by refining their career path, knowledge and skills," he added.

And there's another incentive – those who excel in their grades could be eligible to join du's Masar Graduate Trainee Programme, where they would receive coaching, a personal development plan, and training to allow them to progress within the company. To be eligible for one of these limited scholarships, however, a student must have an 80% minimum pass rate in their final exams.

In 2015, the scholarship was initially made available to 20 Emirati high school graduates, before being expanded to accept 22, of which 59 percent were females. Nassir explains that du was so overwhelmed with the sheer talent of applicants and the turnout, that they had "no choice but to extend the scope of the scholarship" that year. "Once again, we are setting the benchmark and we hope to inspire entities throughout the UAE to take a similar approach."

Etihad Airways aims to recruit more than 6,000 nationals by 2020

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(L-R) Hamed Alredha and Ahmed Haisan, Etihad Airways' Emirati graduate trainee engineers.

A NATIONWIDE MOVEMENT

Indeed, Etihad and du's programs seem to have galvanized other UAE institutions. During the Tawdheef career fair of 2015, Abu Dhabi Transmission & Despatch Company (TRANSCO) launched an 18-month work readiness programme to help develop trainees' skills and provide them with accreditation upon completion.

The initiative is expected to 'provide a solid technical foundation for aspiring young Emiratis who wish

to build successful careers in energy and water sectors", according to TRANSCO's human resource and administration manager Hayyah Al Ali.

Meanwhile, a select group of science, technology, engineering and mathematics students in Abu Dhabi will be expediting their career paths through Microsoft's Developer Experience. Thanks to a recent agreement between Abu Dhabi Systems and Information Centre (ADSIC) and Microsoft, the multinational technology company will train 50 UAE nationals for three months.

After this period, ADSIC and Microsoft will work together to handpick a shortlist of the best candidates, who will be invited to apply for the Microsoft Academy for College Hires. This two-year program aims to hire university graduates into full-time positions within marketing, sales, services, IT and operations.

'At Microsoft, we believe that building human capacity is central to sustaining economies around the world. With more than 28 percent of the population in the Middle East aged between 15 and 29, the potential of this generation can be harnessed by empowering all young people with the necessary entrepreneurial skills,' says Samer Abu-Ltaif, general manager for Microsoft's Gulf subsidiary.

'Our collaboration with ADSIC is a significant step toward this, as it provides young UAE nationals with skills that are in line with current market trends and gives them the competence to become self-employed.'

Fast-track employment programs are evidently delivering value to both sides. On one hand, they're providing fresh graduates access to quality training and careers with pioneering firms, and on the other, they're enabling employers to recruit the best talents in their fields.

With the UAE Vision 2021 aspiring to increase the number of Emiratis in the private sector by tenfold, and with the Expo 2020 approaching, it is very likely that we will see more companies adopt such schemes in the next five years.

Abu Dhabi Transmission & Despatch Company launched an 18-month work readiness programme during Tawdheef job fair.

- Heba Hashem