

# The National



## Project prepares students for private sector

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DUBAI // A non-profit group is aiming to boost leadership and communication skills among state school students by matching youngsters with role models from private sector companies.

Emirati students from state schools often avoid the private sector because it requires skills they did not develop during their studies, according to employment experts.

Now, Injaz-UAE, the local arm of Junior Achievement Worldwide, is working to rectify this imbalance and ensure public school students have a comprehensive skillset.

The organisation offers pupils the chance to establish a link with volunteers from private groups and develop skills such as financial literacy and entrepreneurship. The exposure aims to help them choose a suitable career path, and complements the Government's Emiratisation programme.

A 2007-2008 study by the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation found that only 37 per cent of Gulf chief executives were satisfied with the skills of their Gulf nationals, leading them to focus on hiring expatriates.

Mohammed al Neaimi, the programme director of Tawteen, an empowerment agency established by the Emirates Foundation, said: "If UAE nationals are given the skills that allow them to believe they have a stake in the development of their still-young nation, then the drive and inspiration that comes with that will ensure creativity and growth."



The survey highlighted the disparity between prospective employees' skills and the abilities which employers wanted of their staff. Problem areas included communication, teamwork and creative thinking. Organisations such as Injaz-UAE are working to close that gap, said Sheikh Khalid bin Zayed bin Saqer, its chairman.

"Many public school students shy away from private sector jobs due to lack of knowledge and exposure to the corporate sector, a situation the Ministry of Education has been keen to reform," he said.

Injaz-UAE has been collaborating with the Ministry for the past three years, with 537 volunteers helping more than 6,200 students from 15 institutions.

That effort helps compensate for the lack of training students receive in public schools, due in some cases to insufficient facilities, said Sulaf al

Zu'bi, the chief executive of Injaz-UAE.

"Emirati nationals who are in private schools do not lack soft skills per se, since many private schools have career-oriented programmes," she said. "It's not a matter of nationality, but a matter of education and the schools that students attend."

Volunteers provide students with hands-on experience to develop critical-thinking skills.

Mohammed Azab, the executive director of Citi Private Bank, a volunteer in the project, said "It was really exciting to see that I could apply my personal work experience while teaching students to identify issues, think out of the box and come up with solutions to challenges."

One part of the programme involved learning how to launch a business with a group of people, said Zainab Hassan, a 16-year-old who is in Grade 10 at the Za'abeel Public School.

She is Interested in pursuing a degree in political science, and after taking part in the Injaz-UAE project she believes working in the private sector upon graduating would be more valuable.