

# The National



## Professionals return to school as jobs market shrinks

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DUBAI // More students are taking higher degrees because of the shrinking jobs market, despite having to shoulder a greater financial burden.

Universities have seen a marked increase in students studying for master's degrees and other postgraduate diplomas.

The number of master's students at the Canadian University in Dubai this year tripled from last year, while there was a more than one-third increase in the same period at Zayed University last year compared with the previous year.

Taking a master's, which can cost between Dh54,800 and Dh179,000, is one way students can increase their chances in a tough jobs market. The Dubai Statistics Centre said almost four times as many people were retrenched in Dubai last year compared with the previous year.

"Postgraduate degrees offer closer contact with the business world as they provide opportunities for case studies, research, discussions, networking and interaction, besides the academic knowledge provided," said Konstantina Sakellariou, a partner with the recruitment firm Stanton Chase International.

"Having advanced degrees adds a competitive edge as it guarantees that the person has acquired knowledge that is going to act as a significant basis for his or her first business steps."

Academics agree that the economic crisis had affected student employment over the past 18 months, though the situation had improved.

"With the present economic situation, it's advisable to gain additional qualifications," said Cornelio Gomes, the career development centre co-ordinator at Wollongong University in Dubai.

"[A master's] equips you with skills and gives you the knowledge of the subject to move into a senior role."

Specialising in a particular discipline can be invaluable in setting employees apart from the competition, said Asad Khan, a 22-year-old Pakistani with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

"To be an expert in a field, you really need to study it thoroughly," said Mr Khan, who intends to pursue a master's in sustainable energy. "At the same time, it gives you an edge over other professionals."

Financial concerns mean some students worry about taking higher courses, believing that finding work must be the priority.

But despite uncertainty over the importance of higher education in the current economic climate, some companies actively encourage employees to continue their studies. Mohammed al Natour, a 29-year-old Jordanian, was offered a scholarship by his employers, the engineers Drake and Scull, to take a master's in applied finance. "I am in a field where I have to improve," he said.

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