

Project Success Story

Institution

Abu Dhabi University, United Arab Emirates

Project title

Employability strategy and Teaching and Learning enhancement lead to awards and recognition at Abu Dhabi University, the largest private university in the United Arab Emirates.

Background/Context

Advance HE has been working with Abu Dhabi University (ADU) since 2017. The University is “committed to providing an engaging learning environment, quality education and qualifications that are respected worldwide.”

The University had the goal of developing and embedding an institutional approach to employability and wanted to reward and recognise its teaching staff. The University has subsequently been internationally recognised for its approach to employability; and, following investment in teaching, 50 faculty have been recognised through Advance HE’s Fellowship scheme, with four senior faculty and members of staff accredited as Senior Fellows, with ADU’s Associate Provost becoming a Principal Fellow. The programmes introduced at Abu Dhabi University, in partnership with Advance HE, to support Fellowship accreditations is underpinned by the internationally recognised [Professional Standards Framework](#). The University is an Advance HE International Access Member.

Solution

To enable the employability pillar of its 2017-2022 strategy, ADU partnered with Advance HE in 2017 to implement its employability strategy. The vision was to develop a culture of learning and teaching excellence in its faculty as the catalyst for improving student outcomes and experience. The approach adopted was a ‘whole-university’ approach to embedding employability into every aspect of the student experience from the lecture theatre to extracurricular activity.

Today, the University’s work in employability characterised by “cutting-edge and advanced programmes strongly aligned with market demands, practical career advice, hands-on laboratory and project experience, industry-specific training opportunities, and exposure to showcase their qualifications.” A key factor is the understanding and contribution of staff in identifying opportunities to align multiple aspects of the student experience to qualifications and personal attributes for success in the workplace, and significantly improving student opportunities to showcase their skills to employers.

Concurrently, ADU invested in upskilling faculty teaching competence and learning leadership in the university, working in collaboration with Advance HE. The institution took a learning and development needs approach to supporting and recognising its staff, offering:

- The Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme, aligned to the PSF, a comprehensive programme to engage faculty with student centred teaching practices, with a focus on embedding employability in the curriculum. Following the programme, staff used their experience as evidence in subsequent applications for Advance HE Fellowship. This programme has been offered to two cohorts of staff, with a further cohort planned in 2023
- Fellowship Writing Workshops, to support its experienced staff to gain Fellowship based on their experience
- A bespoke programme to promote teaching and learning leadership which resulted in four senior faculty being accredited as Senior Fellows, including the Vice-Chancellor for Financial and Administrative Affairs, the Dean of the College of Business, the Associate Dean of the College of Engineering, and the Director ADU's SMART learning centre. In 2022 also, the Associate Provost for Research and Academic Development was awarded a Principal Fellowship.

ADU launched its 2022-2027 strategy which build upon this success which includes a central pillar promoting the delivery of an exceptional student experience which will be supported with ongoing partnership with Advance HE.

Outcomes

Learning Quality and Employability: Following the successful implementation of its employability strategy, graduates of ADU have been rated the most employable in the United Arab Emirates in the *Times Higher* 'Graduate Employability Rankings': ADU was ranked first in the UAE for employability, second in the GCC and at 170 globally. In the *Times Higher Education* 2022 World University rankings, ADU was ranked first for teaching in the UAE, and was also received the prestigious 5 QS Star rating for the first time.

Professor Ghassan Aouad, the recently appointed Chancellor of the Abu Dhabi University, commented, "Before I joined the University, I was impressed by the strategic approach ADU took to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and ensure an exceptional student experience across every aspect of students' journey with us. The university's performance across multiple rankings is testament to the exceptional role our global faculty play in the development our students' knowledge, skills and competencies to prepare them for 21st Century employment opportunities. We remain absolutely committed to supporting our students achieve their full academic potential, as well as developing their personal growth as well-rounded and productive individuals. I look forward to working with my colleagues to achieve even greater heights for the benefit of our whole University community."

Stuart Norton, Advance HE Senior Adviser (Learning and Teaching) said, "We were delighted to be part of ADU's success story. The strength of their employability strategy lies

in the whole university approach and the leadership of the top team and the energy of all the staff. It's a great model of the framework in action. The results speak for themselves."

Professor Philip Hamill, Associate Provost, Research and Academic Development (ADU) – and Principal Fellow – said, "I'm delighted to be part of this development journey with my colleagues to advance the quality of teaching and learning at ADU. Through this collaboration, we will ensure our graduates have the attributes valued by employers which will support them throughout their career journey. Our faculty fellows' hard work reflects their professional commitment to delivering an engaging learning environment and providing high-quality education. This collaboration reinforces our capabilities both individually and as an institution. This is a great achievement for our whole community and faculty members whose work is being recognized and rewarded as well as students who enjoy a world-class academic experience."

Ian Hall, Advance HE Head of International Membership, said: "We have a close and productive partnership with Abu Dhabi University (ADU). It's been an honour to work with a university like ADU that is committed to investing in faculty development to achieve Fellowship and support the university's strategy by introducing innovative teaching methods to equip their students with the needed skills that employers demand."

Hear from ADU Fellows

ADU continues its collaboration with Advance HE to invest in faculty development and ensure successful implementation of ADU's employability strategy as well the continuing work to enhance and deliver good teaching practice.

Through the collaboration a portfolio of initiatives was introduced to meet individual development needs from entry-level faculty up to senior management. Fellowship demonstrates a personal and institutional commitment to professionalism in learning and teaching in higher education. Awarded across four categories, Fellowship reflects an academic career journey from being an excellent individual teacher to providing institutional teaching and learning strategic leadership. The categories include Associate Fellowship (AFHEA), Fellowship (FHEA), Senior Fellowship (SFHEA) and Principal Fellowship (PFHEA). The first phase of this collaboration has resulted in the accreditation of 28 faculty members from ADU as Advance HE Fellows. The University now has 30 Fellows (27 Fellows, two senior fellows and one Principal Fellow); four of them share their thoughts on the benefits of Fellowship and the impact that it has had on their teaching here:

Ms. Deenaz Kanji, Senior Instructor in Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences, says, "The opportunity to participate in a professional development program, which enabled me to become an Advance HE Fellow, was an excellent opportunity to enhance my teaching and learning competence, and demonstrate my commitment to delivering high-quality student learning. In addition to the fact that it makes me more marketable as an accredited higher education professional, it also distinguishes me as a professional who embraces lifelong learning.

However, the most important benefit that I have gained from earning this certification is knowing that my skills, my knowledge and my teaching practice have been validated by

experts in the field. In my case, teaching is intrinsic to me, but knowing that my pedagogical approaches and practices are corroborated by research has boosted my self-confidence. This has emboldened me further to consolidate my practice while trying new approaches.

“As someone who is deeply committed to student engagement in the classroom and overall student success, my newly built confidence enhances students’ learning experiences and further strengthens my student-centred approach.”

Dr. Nejla Ellili, Associate Professor of Finance, College of Business, says, “I was motivated to become an Advance HE Fellow as I wanted an internationally accredited designation which reflected my competence as a higher education teaching and learning professional. Becoming a Fellow improved my understanding of the five areas of activity in higher education. In particular, my development journey to becoming a Fellow enhanced my ability to design different learning activities and to integrate them into my courses. It also developed a much deeper understanding of the need to support students throughout their learning process by taking into consideration the difference in their understanding levels and providing them with adaptive and diverse learning resources.

“I am now also much more focused on the need to use diverse formative and summative assessment tools in my courses to keep track of my students’ learning and to support their specific learning needs when necessary.

“Fellowship emphasized further the importance of introducing my students to different learning environments, such as real-life financial analysis, simulation on a virtual trading platform, and Bloomberg Market Concepts, to bridge the theory-practice-gap and to design authentic assessments.

“It has inspired me to become more involved in continuing professional development activities and to incorporate more of my corporate governance and sustainability research findings into my courses in order to keep my students up-to-date on the latest trends, regulations, and future directions not only in the UAE but also on a global scale.”

Dr. Anas Altarabsheh, Associate Professor of Electrical Engineering, College of Engineering, says, “The Advance HE programme for experienced faculty at Abu Dhabi University was an excellent development opportunity to strengthen my teaching ability. My ultimate goal as a university educator is to engage students in a learning process which prepares them for success as constructive contributors to their future world. I achieve this by providing high-quality teaching and a range of student experiences to connect their learning to the ‘real’ world. As a patent holder, I am also passionate about innovation and seek to instil in my teaching practice activities which require creativity and problem solving as the bedrock for innovation. The swift transition to online learning during the pandemic forced me to critically reflect on my practice and recognize the need to adapt to new technology-enabled learning techniques and environments.

“Participating in the Advance HE programme allowed me to introduce these new competencies into my practice, which were underpinned by research and scholarship when designing courses, student engagement activities, and serving the academic

and wider community. It is personally rewarding to have the internationally recognized Advance H E Fellowship and to be able to use the post-nominal FHEA after my name to communicate my commitment to teaching excellence.

“I encourage my colleagues at Abu Dhabi University, and academic peers, to engage in development opportunities open to them and to also become Fellows of Advance HE to support their professional development.”

Professor Philip Hamill, Associate Provost for Research and Academic Development, Abu Dhabi University, says, “I started my career as an assistant Professor over twenty years ago when I completed a postgraduate certificate in university teaching and became a Fellow. It was one of the most rewarding professional development experiences of my academic career. I have no doubt it supported my long-term career progression. Becoming a qualified university teacher gave me the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies that made my job easier, more enjoyable, and for my students to enjoy a much more enriched high quality learning experience.

“Since then, the Fellowship categories, underpinned by the UK Professional Standards Framework, have provided me with a benchmark and roadmap for professional development. It has allowed me to focus my professional development plan throughout my career, and progress from expert practitioner to strategic leader in higher education. Becoming a Principal Fellow is a professional milestone.

“The application process is rigorous and makes you reflect on your leadership in terms of how you have aligned strategy with policy and implementation to enhance the quality and impact of teaching and learning institutionally. The Principal Fellowship focus on institutional improvement has allowed me to provide the necessary leadership to enhance Abu Dhabi University’s culture of student success enabled by faculty development.”

About ADU

Abu Dhabi University (ADU) is one of the region’s leading academic institutions and one of the UAE’s top three universities according to the Times Higher Rankings, working in line with the UAE Government’s National Agenda to deliver internationally accredited academic programmes and world class research. Established in 2003, with campuses across Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Al Ain, and Al Dhafra, the University has a total enrollment of over 7,500 students from over 100 nationalities. Structured into Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering and Health Sciences, ADU offers over 50 undergraduate and graduate programs across a wide range of disciplines.

Abu Dhabi University is known for its cutting-edge, internationally accredited programs, additionally, ADU’s graduates are highly employable and work in high jobs and further studies with the university and other prestigious institutions. ADU provides its diverse faculty and students with world-class resources, facilities and learning opportunities that foster innovation and support researchers in the production of knowledge and research-based problem solving. The University enjoys strong international collaborations with leading academic institutions and with public and private sector organizations. With institutional accreditation from the US-based Western Association of Schools and

Colleges' Senior College and University Commission (WASC), ADU is ranked 301-350 universities in the world according to the 2023 Times Higher Education World University rankings and received 5 stars in the 2022 QS Stars rating. Abu Dhabi University is among the top three universities in the UAE in holding prestigious accreditations at institutional, college or subject level.

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