Qatar excels in distance learning amidst COVID-19

Qatar acts swiftly in designing effective alternatives to the physical classroom amidst COVID-19, ensuring that students are able to continue learning and not fall behind in their studies.
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Following the closure of all public and private schools and universities on March 10, 2020, to control the COVID-19 outbreak, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) acted swiftly in designing an effective alternative to the physical classroom, ensuring that all students are able to continue their learning and not fall behind in their studies.

The ministry launched a new online learning platform called "Mzeed". This platform offers digital and interactive resources prepared by a qualified team of teachers, early education mentors and curricula specialists. Students can find many resources on this platform including interactive books, textbooks in PDF format, video, audio and many other digital learning materials that enrich the student’s education.

Through this platform, the ministry aims to boost the learning process of the students by providing explanation in an interesting and interactive way, without the constant need to connect to the internet.

The ministry also launched the platform of 'Qlearning' facilitating and supporting all distance learning services.

For students who did not have the equipment or access to e-learning, the ministry through its collaborations with the telecommunications networks in Qatar have provided computers, tablets, laptops and hundreds of broadband devices for Internet access to students who needed them for home-based learning.

Ministry supports private schools
The ministry has directed the 320 private K-12 schools serving more than 200,000 students to design and develop plans for distance learning. The ministry has also provided training and follow-up to some schools that do not have systems for distance learning. In addition, the ministry’s Special Education Affairs Department provided computers and tablets to students whose parents were affected financially by the pandemic. This was made possible through the ministry’s coordination of donations from several companies, businessmen and charities.

Meeting the higher education challenges
Since the announcement of a nationwide closure of all schools and universities amid the COVID-19 pandemic, universities have also moved to resume studies through distance learning. The ministry has since been using technology to strengthen the basic distance education systems. Further, the ministry is ensuring that the evaluation and assessment systems and examinations are also benefiting from current policies and practices in distance learning.

Qatari scholarship students
MOEHE has also been following up daily with the overseas learning experiences of all Qatari scholarship students as well as those students who are studying abroad at their own expense. The ministry is checking on the conditions of those students, helping those who want to return home and coordinating with their relevant universities to ensure students can complete their studies remotely until the current situation abates. The ministry is also noting that within this temporary period, the 12 percent assessment on subjects will not be counted for total marks within the proportion calculated on distance study.
During this exceptional period, the ministry is maintaining its continuous institutionalised system of school evaluation from grades 4 to 11. That includes final exams for grade 12 students in public schools as well as students enrolled in adult and evening classes. Final examinations for the academic year 2019-20 were conducted under special arrangements to ensure the safety of all students, teachers and other staff members. Preparations by the ministry have been made to maintain a distance of over three meters between all people. Accordingly, exams held in either classrooms that allowed only eight students inside at one time or big halls such as indoor sports venues where only 40 students are allowed to seat at one time. Medical personnel will be present to ensure each student undergoes a physical examination upon entering the classroom. Health observers and supervisors will be onsite to ensure social distancing. All staff will be wearing masks and gloves as a precautionary step for the duration of the tests. The ministry has also provided isolation rooms at the examination sites should any student that arrives show any symptoms.

A detailed plan for all levels of distance learning was developed by the Education Affairs Department of the MOEHE. One of the first major initiatives introduced by the ministry to support students’ distance learning was the establishment of a new educational channel on YouTube, entitled “Qatar’s Distance Learning”, serving grades K-12. This channel is divided into 19 YouTube sub-channels, providing educational materials for all subjects and grades, as well as material for adult learners and students with special needs or disabilities. To further support communication between teachers, students and parents, the Ministry has instructed schools to utilize the platform of Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) that allows these parties to have immediate and direct contact with each other. In addition, two free-to-air educational TV channels were set up in affiliation with Qatar TV named ‘Education 1’ and ‘Education 2’. This was made possible under Qatar Media Corporation’s (QMC) social responsibility initiative to help ease students transitions from learning in a physical classroom to online learning.

Qatar is not alone. The whole world is experiencing this pandemic and subsequent disruption to the educational process. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is keeping apprised of all the developments related to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Qatar and abroad and will make future decisions as the situation develop.

In the meantime, it is important to note that the ministry itself has adopted several temporary measures in line with the Cabinet’s decision to reduce the number of employees in the workplace of government agencies. Despite this disruption, the ministry’s dedicated employees successfully facilitated the transition of the educational system to online learning and is continuing to support students and teachers to achieve further success. Moreover, these employees are providing the most essential e-services to the public, while at the same time, providing vocational safety and health requirements to protect staff from infection. The ministry continues to coordinate with relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Transport and Communications. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in close coordination with the Ministry of Public Health, decided to implement the blended learning approach for the first semester of 2020/21 academic year. A combination of online learning and classroom-based lessons are being offered to all stages of education across the public and private schools, preschools and higher education institutions. The blended learning approach aims to mitigate the academic consequences of the school closures and delay of the new academic year.
**Olive International School: Building brand to stand out from the rest**

**MERIAM JELLITI**

Olive International School continues to develop by keeping pace with modern and updated educational methods targeted to develop students’ level and fulfill their need for learning, innovation and excellence, the school’s chairman has said.

In an interview, Olive International School Chairman Saleh bin Abdullah Al Sulaiti said, “Olive International School has succeeded in securing its position among the best schools in Qatar during the last seven years of hard work. The total number of students across the school’s five branches in Al Hilal, Al Thumama, Ain Khalid, Al Khariitiyat and Umm Salal, exceeds 3,000 currently.”

Emphasising on the process that led to the success of Olive school since its inception in Qatar seven years ago, the chairman said, “Due to the choice made from the very beginning of a renewed educational approach that emerged through multiple agreements with professional teaching cadres from international educational institutions and organisations, we managed to establish a well-recognised school.”

He pointed out that the educational programme offered by Olive School is approved by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and that the school follows essential pillars mainly supporting talents and developing students’ capabilities. He explained that the school does not recruit educational personnel directly, but through international institutes recognised internationally and in Qatar.

“Taking into consideration the importance of sports in life, our school signed agreements with a well known sport institute in Australia to provide us with physical training tutors. We also signed a deal with a specialised language institute from the UK to provide us with excellent language tutors and teachers,” Sulaiti said.

He said, “We also pay great attention to talents and always seek ways to develop and support them by contracting with an institution specialised in leadership and the art of public speaking to train future leaders. And thus enabling the student to express and lead.”

The chairman also said that the school has contracted with an educational institute for students with special needs, to renew the school’s commitment to support all students and prepare them for a successful life ahead.

Speaking about the exceptional circumstances that the world is witnessing, Sulaiti said that the school was able to overcome the difficulties faced at the beginning of the pandemic and kept pace with the changes. He also said that online learning has succeeded through the guidance of the Ministry of Education.

“These difficulties were seen as an opportunity to face the challenge and prove that Olive school is able to cope, and furthermore, rectify difficulties in record time. The students quickly adapted, owing that to the efforts of our team and the support of families,” he said.

Sulaiti said that families had a significant role in helping the school and that without their efforts in supporting their children, online education wouldn’t have succeeded in this short amount of time.

He stressed that all necessary trainings were given to the staff of the school, starting with how to adapt and adopt to online learning, all the way to covering technical aspects.

“As for delivering materials and lessons to students, teachers are more than competent,” he said.

According to the chairman, opening secondary school is one of the main priorities as part of the expansion plan. “Transitioning to the secondary stage is not just a plan, but a necessity, and achieving takes time and effort. That is why we are currently studying the plan, and transition to the secondary level is a certain matter and to be a reality very soon,” he said.

He said, “Continuing to look at the quality of education is considered a permanent plan. Online learning for instance achieved excellent results and had only positive impact, as well as contributed to the participation of the families with students and school, resulting in stronger communication and higher awareness among students.”

The chairman praised the vision of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in supporting private schools and ensuring success of education developing process in Qatar.

Sulaiti expressed his pride in the progress of education in Qatar and praised the wise leadership for constantly seeking to develop the educational system in the country.
Doha British School (DBS) has officially opened admissions to the newest member of the DBS family - DBS Rawdat Al Hamama.

The new campus, set to open in September 2021, will be located near the iconic Lusail City. It will offer the same outstanding National Curriculum of England and will accept girls and boys aged 3–18 years old.

The state-of-the-art campus will feature an indoor swimming pool, a dedicated multi-purpose sports hall, landscaped outdoor playing field, and a modern, contemporary, fully-equipped theatre. All classrooms will be furnished with the latest IT infrastructure, ensuring that teachers have access to the most innovative teaching and learning environment possible.

“Our new campus underpins DBS’ commitment to deliver outstanding British curriculum in Qatar. We are pursuing our essential purpose which is to provide a first-class education, enabling pupils to thrive within a dynamic, global environment,” Terry McGuire, DBS Acting Director of Education, said.

“We insist on engaging, challenging, and interactive lessons that create an inquisitiveness and thirst for learning in our students,” McGuire said.

A HISTORY OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
DBS is a family of schools catering to more than 2,400 students from over 90 different nationalities. The school originated in Doha in 1997 and this was joined by the Al Wakra campus in 2014.

With the addition of the new campus, DBS is proud to support Qatar National Vision 2030 in establishing a world-class education system, comparable to that offered anywhere in the world.

OUTSTANDING EXAM RESULTS
In 2020, DBS students achieved their best ever IGCSE examination results with 95 percent of students achieving five or more grades (4-9). As many as 25 percent of students also achieved a grade (9), the highest grade possible. Moreover, 100 percent of DBS students successfully applied to universities across the world, with 20 percent achieving places at some of the top Russell Group universities in the UK.

DBS also offers four different pathways for students at Post 16 which include IB, AS/A level and BTEC. Students can then progress to City University College (in partnership with Ulster University) to study a wide range of undergraduate programmes. With DBS, students can get a complete educational package from Early Years through to university. This provides a route for students to graduate from DBS and remain in Qatar.

In January 2020, DBS schools were re-accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS). It has also been accredited by the Qatar National Schools Accreditation (QNSA), British Schools of the Middle East (BSME) and was awarded ‘Outstanding’ status by British Schools Overseas (BSO).

Doha British Schools have high aspirations for all students and believe that every child or young adult should gain as much as possible from the school, based on the belief that all learners can, need and want to achieve.” DBS prides itself on providing outstanding student-centred education. The schools operate under strong and experienced leadership. The senior leaders have a wealth of knowledge from the international schools environment as well as the UK school system. The schools promote an ethos of high expectations and the importance of high academic success for all the students. DBS also focuses on character development to ensure that students are fully prepared for the wider world.
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Oryx Universal College (OUC), in partnership with prestigious Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), was approved by Qatar’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education to offer a distinct set of programmes for students in Qatar in 2019.

Focused on delivering STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) skills and knowledge, OUC commenced enrolling students in March 2020 and is now inviting applications for September 2021 with four distinguished degree programmes that students can complete and graduate in Qatar.

According to Oryx Universal College Co-founder and Chairman Dr Homaid Almadfa, Oryx Universal College is committed to its mission of ‘empowering our generation and the future generations to be global leaders; through creation, application and propagation of knowledge, research and innovation.’

Oryx Universal College is located at Al Jazira Al Arabiya Street, Al Messila and equipped with state-of-the-art civil engineering laboratories, a modern computer laboratory, an innovation hub, collaborative study spaces, a library and cafeteria. The facilities are designed to bring a combination of the best student experiences and accomplishment of internationally acclaimed career-oriented learning outcomes.

An experienced team of faculty members led by Dr Anthony Charles Auchterlonie, who brings a wealth of academic and professional experience, has teamed up with the founders to shift the benchmarks that cover the higher education offerings in Qatar.

LJMU HIGHLIGHTS

◆ First University to receive two commended judgements from QAA – UK (in 2016)
◆ Top 20 university for Engineering (The Complete University Guide 2019)
◆ Ranked 3rd for research in the University Alliance Group (REF 2014)
◆ 95% of graduates in work or further study within six months (DLHE 2016/2017)
◆ Top 50 in the UK (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020)
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At NAISAK, our virtual school education leverages the power of our impressive collaborations with The Juilliard School and MIT, as well as our world-class Global Classroom learning platform.

NORD Anglia International School Al Khor (NAISAK) is part of the Nord Anglia Education family of schools. Comprising 73 schools in 30 countries, NAISAK is an integral part of a globally connected network providing a premium education to more than 68,000 students worldwide.

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up many challenges for schools. This time last year, schools in Qatar all closed their doors and NAISAK had to pivot to provide full time online education for our students. Happily, our future-facing outlook allowed us to smoothly transition to online learning and provide Nord Anglia’s VSE (virtual school experience) to the students in our care.

The best virtual learning is complementary to classroom learning, not a like-for-like substitution. Many families originally felt that ‘live lessons’ were best, and it’s certainly true that streaming lessons directly from the classroom can be a powerful tool. However, any adult who has ever had to sit looking at a computer screen for more than a few hours will understand that continuous live lessons are not, after all, the best way to deliver online learning.

Children need to wiggle about and take frequent short breaks! Instead, at NAISAK we provide a mixture of activities that offer students a chance to be more autonomous in their learning.

One powerful tool at our disposal is Nord Anglia Education’s ‘Global Classroom’ learning platform. Students from early years to year 13 can select from a bank of online activities tailored to their age and interests. NAISAK children particularly enjoyed joining in with the wellbeing activities on Global Campus, such as the yoga sessions designed to support children’s physical and mental wellbeing.

Our VSE also leveraged the power of our impressive collaborations with The Juilliard School in New York and MIT in Boston. For example, NAISAK students enjoyed live performing arts workshops direct from a musician based at The Juilliard School. When travel is a possibility again, we will look forward to welcoming guest lecturers, performers and educators from both organisations, but until that day we can still offer plenty of enriching activities for our students through our world-class VSE.

Even when students are able to return to campus five days a week, virtual learning will still remain a part of our educational experience. Schools need to be ‘future ready’ so they can ensure their students are ready for tomorrow, whatever the future may hold.

ELIZABETH LAMB
NAISAK Principal
THE Arab International Academy (AIA) was founded in Qatar in 2016, based on a belief that educating our children is a critical step in building their future as individuals and contributing members of our society, who will help enhance progress on national, regional, and international levels.

The initiative to establish AIA emerged from the desire to contribute to the Qatar 2030 Vision, which aims to build a Qatari educational system that promotes critical thinking and creates a capacity for innovation. In support of the vision, Arab International Academy has incorporated unique features such as a well-developed international curriculum, excellent facilities, and cross-curricular content designed to promote learning and use of multiple languages.

Arab International Academy strives to implement rigorous, international academic programmes that align with the mission and vision. Therefore, Arab International Academy pursued and received the IB authorisation to implement the Diploma Programme, the Middle Years Programme, and the Primary Years Programme. It also gained Qatar National School Accreditation and CIS membership.

The IB Programmes’ goal is to develop the whole person cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically. The IB programmes also strive to help students develop the ability to face challenges with an open mind and cultivate an awareness of their identity and culture to understand and accept others. The IB programme’s philosophy is designed to create students who are thinkers, inquirers, communicators, risk-takers and are also balanced, reflective, principled, caring, knowledgeable, and open-minded.

All children in the preschool learn English and Arabic. As they progress, they will additionally learn French as a third language. In primary school, one track provides the language of instruction in English and students learn Arabic and French as second and third languages. In the other elementary track, the language of instruction in grades K-5 is Arabic, with English being taught at an advanced level, and students also learn French as a third language.

Furthermore, At AIA, we believe in technology’s importance in creating a dynamic teaching and learning environment. We also think that digital fluency and citizenship are essential aspects of all students’ academic and professional success. Therefore, we provide quality hardware and a high-speed internet connection to enable the school community to access and leverage online content and communities fully. We also offer our teaching staff continuous training regarding seamless integration of all aspects of technology in their classrooms to enhance students’ learning experiences.
Q: Can you tell us about the role that Mowasalat (Karwa) plays in the school transportation system of Qatar? How many schools do you serve at the governmental and private levels? Do you provide any services to universities and other educational institutes in the country?

A: At Mowasalat, we are a supporting pillar of the traffic infrastructure in Qatar. As such, we have proudly provided transportation solutions to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) with a fleet of 2500 buses, servicing both public and private schools since 2006. With more than 260 government schools and 7 private schools being serviced, we are constantly looking for ways to expand and enhance our partnerships.

Within the next few months, all Mowasalat school buses that are operated for the MOEHE will be fully equipped with state-of-the-art safety features under the ‘Smart School Transport’ project. We will launch additional safety controls to ensure students’ wellbeing, including external cameras that cover all the drivers’ blind spots as well as multiple sensors that will alert the driver when anyone is in close proximity of the bus.

Other features include vehicle tracking services and a card reader that will monitor the students’ attendance as well as pick-up and drop-off locations via a check-in/check-out function. Additionally, parents will have access to an application where they can schedule pick-up locations, monitor their child’s attendance, track their location and numerous other features for the students’ safety. Our Operations Command Center, the MOEHE, and the schools will all have access to a portal where they can monitor overall service quality and ridership, have live and historical tracking of all buses, design bus routes and assign drivers to vehicles, manage complaints, provide accurate data for guardians and students, and monitor driver behaviour.

Through projects like this, we nurture our partnership with the MOEHE. We support the nation’s educational legacy and we will continue our effort to support the Qatar’s National Vision 2030.

What are the types and features of Mowasalat school buses? How many students are allowed to be in each bus?

Our school buses are custom designed to ensure compliance with the best industry standards and the required safety rules and regulations. All buses are equipped with fire extinguishing systems that consist of three vital integrated steps: detection, alarm, and suppression. The buses are of various seating capacities and designed to meet the MoEHE’s requirements to achieve ultimate safety and comfort for the students. The fleet consists of 25, 35 and 41-seater buses. With the COVID-19 precautionary measures, the bus capacity is currently reduced to ensure the Ministry of Public Health’s (MOPH) rules and regulations. With a flexible schedule, we also support the schools in their part-time schooling efforts.

How is the coordination between Mowasalat and schools in terms of school transportation and student safety of all ages?

Mowasalat and the schools regularly coordinate and communicate to discuss various matters, mostly related to the student’s safety and transport operations. We constantly provide each school’s management with all the necessary materials and guidelines in relation to the operations standards and safety rules and regulations, which consist of the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. The schools are then responsible to share these guidelines with the students, school’s workforce, and parents as necessary. In case of any irregularity, the school and the Mowasalat operations team mutually investigate the root cause, analyse the situation, and ensure corrective measures are immediately taken.

What are the precautionary measures in school buses? How is the sanitization of buses performed? What is the interval between each sanitization processes?

With the current COVID-19 restrictions, the seating capacity is reduced in all buses in line with the MOPH’s guidelines. Strict rules and regulations are implemented in coordination with the MOEHE to ensure the safety of the students and our workforce. Our drivers undergo PCR tests prior to starting their shifts. School drivers’ vaccinations are prioritised and are currently on-going in an effort to have them all vaccinated by the first week of April.

Our fleet is sanitised daily by a dedicated sanitisation team, who are all trained by our HSSE department to ensure the most effective sanitisation techniques. The material being used during the sanitisation process is authorised by the HSSE team as per regulatory requirements and safety standards. The sanitisation team is also equipped with the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the sanitisation process to ensure their safety.

All drivers and operations staff are screened daily by conducting temperature checks, making sure they have a green EHTERAZ status, and are wearing face masks. Similarly, students also undergo temperature checks before boarding the bus, are reminded to wear their face masks and adhere to social distancing.

How are suspected cases dealt with, if found among students? What are the regulations for someone not to comply with the precautionary measures?

Our crisis management committee established a procedure to report suspected cases. First, the MOEHE notifies the school’s operations team in case of any suspected cases for their immediate action. From our end, our medical center upon receiving the notification immediately arranges PCR testing for the drivers who transported anyone who is currently suspected, as well as their roommates. Furthermore, we arrange for their isolation period as per the MOEHE’s guidelines in a Mowasalat approved isolation facility.

Our drivers and staff are well educated about the pandemic and the associated precautionary measures, and regular daily inspections are being conducted by our operations teams and the HSSE to ensure compliance with the set safety measures.

Is there direct supervision from the relevant authorities in the MOEHE to the process of applying precautionary measures in school buses?

We have been working closely with the MOEHE to ensure the safety of the students and all workforce. Roles and responsibilities have been assigned for each stakeholder respectively. Any discrepancies are immediately reported to the concerned stakeholder and corrective actions are taken accordingly.

What are the criteria by which school bus drivers are selected? How do you ensure the safety of bus workers and that they are free of coronavirus?

Generally, school drivers’ selection takes place in line with the criteria set by us and the MOEHE. Drivers are vaccinated, have a clean past record, and experience. School drivers undergo special trainings and safety awareness courses to improve their skills and equip them with the most advanced professional driving practices and techniques. Additionally, the drivers are well trained to handle any emergency cases. As for ensuring their safety, all drivers and operations staff are well informed about the pandemic and the associated precautionary measures.
SEVERAL opportunities have stemmed from the switch to remote learning post-COVID-19 pandemic environment for higher education. In an interview with the Oxford Business Group (OBG), Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) President Ahmad Hasnah talks about how economic trends and technological innovations are shaping the curricula in tertiary education.

To what extent was HBKU prepared to mitigate the risks and capitalise on the opportunities arising from the pandemic?

Hasnah: "At all education levels, new technologies are shaping the curricula in tertiary education? Skills in the IT domain – from artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, to cybersecurity – were in high demand even before the pandemic. The market will certainly require more experts in these areas, but other disciplines are also drawing more interest. Take ethics, for example: when it comes to AI, cybersecurity and data privacy, the ethical dimension is very important and requires a foundation in legal studies for the development of specific regulatory frameworks. Another field that merits consideration is digital humanities, which focuses on the effects of cyberspace on areas such as labour, media and art. Therefore, although HBKU will invest heavily in IT-related programmes, it will also address surrounding ethical, legal and social issues."

What else can be done to promote the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines?

Hasnah: At all education levels, STEM disciplines are instrumental in the development of any country. The main focus should be on making the study of these areas attractive to students and this requires abandoning the mentality that size fits all. HBKU and Qatar Foundation are looking at ways to offer a more personalised experience tailored to the specific learning mechanisms each student responds to best. While the end goal is to ensure knowledge and skills obtained might be the same, the entry point for each student does not need to be.

STEM training should be complemented with teaching social disciplines to provide a solid competence framework upon which universities and higher education, such as HBKU, will guide students. Technological advancement requires a comprehensive set of social and economic tools to be ethically and commercially sustainable. That is why HBKU advocates for interdisciplinarity: besides technical or scientific expertise, students need to grasp the behavioural, social, legal and policy implications of new technologies.

Moreover, by the time students graduate, they should have an entrepreneurial spirit. At HBKU we have established an innovation centre that guides recently graduated students in their entrepreneurial efforts – even if they fail at the beginning – by offering financial support. The overall aim is to encourage students to experiment.

QATAR Foundation’s partner universities are home to students from more than 113 countries. And this diverse student body helps young people learn about and embrace different cultures, ethnicities, beliefs, and opinions, and ultimately broadens perspectives and promotes acceptance and understanding.

"Qatar Foundation houses people from many different backgrounds," says Fatima Al Sulaiti, a Qatari student at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, one of eight Qatar Foundation (QF) partner universities situated within Education City.

"Being a student in such a diverse community has allowed many topics to be raised regarding stereotypes and misconceptions. Class conversations have allowed me to help others from different backgrounds, as well as learn more about my own culture," she says.

Sulaiti believes creating platforms for open discussion allows others to learn and ask questions. "However, it is important to be aware of the fact that not everyone is coming with the same mindset and set of background knowledge – not everyone knows about other cultures and backgrounds," she says.

Sulaiti points out that it is important for students to interact with others because interacting with people from different backgrounds and understanding different cultures helps shape more understanding individuals.

"I personally find it extremely important to have an inclusive society, as this allows people to be more culturally aware and open-minded," she said.

Basel Humos, a student at Weill Cornell Medicine–Qatar from Ramallah, Palestine, says, "From the very first day that I joined WCM-Q, I was overwhelmed with the immense sense of generosity and hospitality of everyone." According to Humos, when engaging in such a diverse environment like Qatar, it is important to make sure that you are culturally aware and respectful.

"This was not easy for me in the beginning, when I was introduced to so many nationalities that I had never interacted with before. In Palestine, I only interacted with Palestinians and that’s it. I was not exposed to all the other cultures that are present in the community here. Despite this cultural ‘setback’, I would sit down with people of all ethnicities and simply ask them about their story and background. It might be hard to be culturally competent from the very beginning, but it’s not hard to be respectful and curious." He says, "I made it a mission of mine to engage with as many people from as many cultures as possible. It didn’t take long for me to realise that the shortest distance between two people from two different cultures is a question," he says.

Humos points out that to be successful in a society with so much racial and ethnic diversity in its student body and faculty is an opportunity to discover different parts of the world while staying in the same place. And it’s a daily reminder about the importance and significance of values such as tolerance, inclusivity, and acceptance.

"Besides graduating with a college degree, I will leave Qatar Foundation as a more culturally competent student who understands that with diversification comes so much more than just awareness of cultures, but also a code of ethics that is built on mutual love and respect," he says.

Ahsha Shaikh, a student at Texas A&M University at Qatar, moved from India to Qatar when she was just two months old. "The most beautiful thing about being here is that you are celebrating the culture and owning it. I believe that recognising the diversity within us paves the way for an open-minded and global culture," she says.

Shaikh points out that QF’s diverse student body embraces inclusivity and promotes productivity, explaining that in group projects, she is able to work with people from all over the world.

"Overall, I have learned that kindness and understanding are key in communicating with students from different nationalities. I see so much respect and care around me all the time that I think I have actually grown up and that’s why I find the environment here, in Education City, perfect for enriching learning experiences," she says.
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A SK a parent of a tween what one of their biggest challenges is and you will often hear that it is extracting information from their child. How often have you asked, “What did you learn in school today?” and the answer that follows is either “I don’t know” or “Umm...nothing.” It takes an engaging curriculum, taught by passionate and experienced teachers, to ignite excitement in pre-teen and teen students. At The Hamilton International School, they understand this conundrum and strive to create a learning environment where your child is positively challenged and excited to come to school, each and every day.

“Our teaching team is comprised of UK trained and experienced professionals that have extensive global experience. Our teachers are passionate educators who have taught in Europe, Asia, North America and the Middle East and bring a vast array of experience to the classroom,” explains Terry Senior, principal of Hamilton International School.

“While our state-of-the-art facilities and purpose-built spaces are impressive, it is the magic that occurs in the classroom that truly sets The Hamilton International School apart. Our exceptional teaching and support staff are committed to delivering an excellent educational experience in every lesson, every day,” he said.

Students are challenged to consider what it means to be successful. At The Hamilton School they believe, to successfully negotiate modern life; students require the capacity to tackle open-ended problems in creative ways—a capacity that requires both critical-thinking skills and the disposition to persevere. Rigorous and relevant learning in a team-taught environment are the building blocks for creative and independent thinkers.

LANGUAGES ARE IMPORTANT

Languages are an essential part of the curriculum at The Hamilton International School, and it is one of the elements that what makes the school an amazing place to learn. While the language of instruction at the school is English, the school provides Arabic language learning in line with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) guidelines for Arab Nationals, with non-native Arabic speakers given the choice to also learn Arabic. Other language choices at the school currently include French and Spanish, with the plan to add more, as per the demand of the school community.

The school’s two Arabic pathways plus enrichments, ensure that Arabic language is embedded across the curriculum. This includes Arabic lessons every day for Arabic first language speakers and there are thrice-per-week Islamic education classes for our Muslim students. The entire school engages in regular activities that promote national identity, Qatari culture and instill Islamic values such as the participation in the Holy Quran competition, celebrating the holy month of Ramadan through different activities including community Iftar, as well as pastoral lessons linked to the values of Islam.

“We believe that learning a different language can unlock potential and open doors for learners, not only as a skill, but language learning also broadens a child’s learning ability. Languages in our modern, globalized world are vital and knowledge of languages can help a student to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others,” said Senior.

INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE YEARS CURRICULUM

The Middle School incorporates the International Middle Years Curriculum (IMYC), which is a challenging, internationally minded and concept-focused curriculum. The IMYC encourages creative and critical thinking skills in a thematic based curriculum to develop active and engaged learners.

“Our IMYC programme allows specific subject and personal goals to be set for each student. This provides for a clear structure in developing knowledge and understanding, whilst still allowing our teachers to connect subject learning to the cultural context of our school,” said Senior.

The IMYC curriculum enables teachers at the school, to create units and lessons that best suit the demographics and interests of our students. In the Middle Years, Mathematics and English basics also continue to be guided by the standards and learning goals, along with the subjects required by the MoEHE.

One way that the IMYC curriculum differs from the UK Key Stage 3 curriculum is that the UK Key Stage 3 curriculum is predominantly contextual to Europe and is not truly global in scope. The IMYC approach takes portions of Key Stage 3 and allows the freedom of adaptation to suit the specific student audience. Blend the American curriculum approach of an investigative and research-based framework, and you have an engaging, rigorous and relevant curriculum that challenges students to apply their learning through stimulating application.

The educational offerings and teaching practices at The Hamilton International School ensures students will be intellectually and emotionally ready to succeed in Qatar and the global community, as tomorrow’s leaders.
AFG College with the University of Aberdeen is a unique partnership between Al Faleh Group for Educational and Academic Services, and the University of Aberdeen, which opened its doors in September 2017.

The establishment of the institution is a significant achievement as AFG College with the University of Aberdeen is the first British university at a dedicated campus offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees within the State of Qatar.

This exciting University project has been developed under the leadership of H.E. Dr Sheikha Aisha Bint Faleh Al Thani, who identified the need for increased capacity within higher education to support the Qatar National Vision 2030 and to contribute to the development of a stronger knowledge-based economy for the country.

AFG’s vision includes the development of a regional research hub, drawing on the strengths of Aberdeen's excellence in global academic research and working collaboratively with other Qatar based educational and institutional partners to contribute to the wider knowledge-based economy within the region.

Now in the fourth year of operation, AFG College with the University of Aberdeen will be developed in two phases. Phase one offers undergraduate degrees in Accountancy and Finance, Business Management, Business Management and Information Systems, Business Management and International Relations, and Business Management and Legal Studies. In addition to, postgraduate degrees including MBA Master of Business Administration, MSc International Business Management, LLM International Commercial Law, International Postgraduate Diploma in Education (IPGDE/MEd), and MSc International Human Resource Management.

Phase two is the establishment of a large purpose-built university campus offering a range of academic disciplines that include STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects, medical sciences, law, politics and international relations.

“AFG College with the University of Aberdeen was founded in 1495 and is currently ranked within the world's top 200 universities*. With over 20 nationalities represented within our student population, Aberdeen Qatar offers a rich and diverse international learning environment in one of the most forward looking nations within the Middle East.” Brian Buckley, Principal of AFG College with the University of Aberdeen.

* Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2021
Will blended learning become the future of education?

What will we have learnt from the pandemic when all is said and done? Will school ever be the same again now that this prolonged period of forced closure has pushed educators all around the world towards a more extensive use of technology to grant their students continuity in the face of adverse circumstances?

With a global health crisis going on, it is only natural to be focused on the present, but as the world begins to feel the beneficial effects of the emergency measures against COVID-19, it is time to look to the future.

What will we have learnt from the pandemic when all is said and done? Will school ever be the same again now that this prolonged period of forced closure has pushed educators all around the world towards a more extensive use of technology to grant their students continuity in the face of adverse circumstances?

This is where blended learning comes in. A hybrid of in-person lessons and distance learning, blended learning is one of the many proposed models for the future of the technology-assisted classroom: let’s have a closer look at its definition and examine why COVID-19 may be the key factor that pushes this model forward in schools worldwide.

FIND YOUR UNIQUE BLEND

It is impossible to find a single definition of blended learning: there are as many ways to blend face-to-face classroom time and online lessons as there are students. It is blended learning to reduce physical attendance in favour of video conferencing so as to create smaller groups that allow for appropriate social distancing, but it is also blended learning to go back to frontal lessons as the prevalent mode of teaching, with technology supporting the learning process more than ever.

That is what makes blended learning a viable model for the future of education: the in-person and online components can be combined in any proportion, with neither being inferior or superior to the other when it comes to grading or evaluating classroom participation, and each student can find a unique blend of the two that suits their own personal learning style best and adapts to their family situation and level of access to technology.

If there is one thing that the sudden, forced switch to remote learning has shown, in fact, it is that not all households are equally prepared to move on to distance learning: with a personal device and a stable Internet connection as necessary requirements not to fall behind, the digital divide between those who can meet the new basic needs of the contemporary world and those who cannot is wider than ever, and physical attendance is still the only option for minors living in two-income households who view school not only as a place of learning, but also as a safe space that provides adult supervision while both parents are working. Given this mixed situation, personalised blended learning that takes these factors into account is the ideal compromise for a post-pandemic society.

THE WORLD IS YOUR CLASSROOM

It is important to note that with blended learning, the content of education changes as much as the mode of communication through which it is conveyed. With mobile devices that can quite literally let you carry your classroom in your pocket and the vastness of the Internet as an alternative to textbooks, blended learning teaches students three key lessons:

* It is impossible to memorise all of the available human knowledge, so education is no longer about memorising facts and answering test questions, but about applying knowledge to real-life situations and knowing where to find reliable information.

* The teacher may not have all the answers: Teachers in a blended learning environment is there to provide guidance and support, act as discussion moderators, and give direction and feedback to student projects, but are no longer the only source of knowledge in a typical top-down structure.

* School is not the only place where you can learn, nor will you stop learning once you have graduated: educating yourself is a continuous process that follows you everywhere.

That is why blended learning is the ideal way to prepare students for a world where knowledge is not a fixed set of facts you can easily divide into self-contained subjects, but a constantly increasing, self-updating, interconnected whole that requires a high degree of independence, flexibility, and willingness to learn and improve well beyond one’s school years, as well as the IT skills that modern life is making as necessary as basic literacy in order to be a productive member of society.
The initial wave of lockdowns in the early part of 2020 prompted education entities to rapidly move to teach online. It also accelerated an existing transition towards a more blended and technologically oriented approach.

As such, while the shift to virtual teaching has on the whole has been well managed and well-received, further investment and policy initiatives are required including digital literacy training for both students and educators, and the establishment of national guidelines and standards.

In parallel to this, access can be improved for example, through the provision of laptops and tablets, and the establishment of Wi-Fi hotspots.

**LEADING THE CHANGE**

As OBG has outlined, a regional pacesetter in the GCC has been Qatar, which saw a widespread uptake of e-learning solutions early in the pandemic period.

The Qatar Computing Research Institute, part of Hamad bin Khalifa University, worked with the Ministry of Public Health in developing a series of new digital platforms.

Indeed, Qatar was well placed to innovate in its higher education sector, which features prominently in the Qatar National Vision 2030 as a critical driver of the country’s transition to a knowledge-based economy.

The Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development is a non-profit organisation dedicated to spearheading Qatar’s move to establish itself as a regional leader in the education space, a key element of which has been a shift to digital learning. The foundation has been at the forefront of efforts to coordinate the higher education sector’s response to COVID-19.

One of its partners is the Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, which was an early adopter of full digitalisation in the face of the pandemic; within two days of the suspension of in-person teaching, the university had shifted all its courses online.

This process was facilitated by a course aimed at training staff in remote teaching. It consisted of a series of instructional videos and learning modules and was made freely available online.

In Bahrain, a bulk of e-learning solutions was carried out through a dedicated electronic education portal, set up by the Ministry of Education and the Bahrain Information and eGovernment Authority, in conjunction with cloud computing platform Amazon Web Services.

Elsewhere, the telcos Bahrain Telecoms Company and Zain Bahrain announced that eligible customers would be able to browse designated educational websites without being charged for data use.

Some further education institutions in the region actively collaborated with authorities to facilitate the shift online.

For example, the UAE’s Ministry of Education worked with the Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University on a series of distance learning programmes to equip academic professionals with the skills to teach online.

In Kuwait, the Australian College of Kuwait was well prepared for the sudden shift online, having already invested in infrastructure and digital resources for e-learning. The college is also at the forefront of the digital shift among the region’s further education institutions; for instance, last year it co-organised a conference with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences on the importance of e-learning in the Arab world.

In Sharjah, meanwhile, one interesting development was the establishment of the Sharjah Education Academy, an e-platform designed to train teachers on the digital transition. It was set up by the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA), which uploaded training sessions and some 130 guidelines.

The SPEA was also responsible for forming the COVID-19 Monitoring and Evaluation Committee for Private Education, which met on a daily basis to assess efforts to deal with the sectoral challenges of the pandemic.

Elsewhere, Saudi Arabia won praise from UNESCO in October for the transition to distance learning across the educational spectrum. In terms of further education, 27 public universities have hosted 2m virtual classes and more than 6m panel discussions in the kingdom since the start of the pandemic.

**A RETURN TO NORMALITY?**

The new academic year recently started with a range of restrictions in place, obliging many universities to build on their recent experience of e-learning and apply hybrid or blended educational approaches, combining online study with limited in-person interaction.

“While many courses can be taught remotely, those with practical elements, for example requiring laboratory work, will inevitably require a return to in-person learning when the conditions are right,” Trick told OBG.

There is a range of benefits associated with a blended approach, including expanded learning options. In this light, it seems likely that such approaches will continue to be applied even after COVID-19 begins to wane.
The Qatar Foundation has launched a programme designed to identify and support the needs of bright, young students in Qatar. The initiative titled ‘Qatar Foundation Gifted Enrichment Programmes’ will be supported by the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth.

As part of a cooperation agreement between the two entities, Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY) will offer a customised version of its Live Interactive Virtual Explorations (LIVE) programme for the Qatar Foundation (QF) initiative.

The Qatar Foundation Gifted Enrichment Programmes will offer engaging online enrichment courses developed and delivered by Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth expert instructors to identify gifted learners to support students through in-person workshops, which adhere to COVID-19 safety protocols, at Qatar Academy for Science and Technology, a QF Pre-University Education (PUE) school.

“We are delighted to announce the cooperative agreement with the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, a global leader in gifted education. This programme will provide learning opportunities to gifted students in Qatar, something previously limited to just a handful of schools locally or programmes outside of the country,” said Cynthia Lynn Bolton, Head of Gifted Support, PUE Academic Affairs, QF.

“QF, we are dedicated to developing and applying innovative models and practices that can influence and continuously improve education across Qatar and the region. And the agreement with the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth is an example of this commitment.”

The CTY agreement will help the development of the Gifted Enrichment Programmes, an effort that aims to serve schools and families across the country seeking support for their gifted students, including a summer programme scheduled to be launched at the end of June 2021.

CTY draws upon its four decades of experience identifying and nurturing the academic talents of young students. The long-term aspiration of this cooperation is to serve gifted learners in Qatar, and to create a thriving and sustainable programme that can serve these students for years to come.
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THREE new Indian schools and one university are expected to open in Qatar in 2021, the Indian embassy in Qatar has said.

“India is keen to work with Qatar in the field of Education which is evident from the fact that there are already 15 Indian schools in Qatar. The cooperation so far has been excellent,” the embassy said.

The new Indian university “Savitribai Phule Pune University” is expected to start its operations in Qatar by the end of this year.

Highlighting the high rankings achieved by Indian universities in the latest World University Rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) for 2021, the embassy said that as many as 12 Indian institutes are in the top 100 of the new list with the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay (IIT-B) achieving 49th rank, IIT-Delhi 54th rank, and IIT-Madras 94th rank.

Moreover, IIT- Kharagpur has bagged 101st position followed by IIT-Bangalore at 103rd rank, IIT- Kanpur, and IIT-Roorkee at 107th and 170th ranks, respectively.

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore is at number 78 for materials science and at 93 for chemistry. IIT-Delhi has achieved top-100 ranks in electrical and electronic engineering (54th, down from 49th in 2020), computer science (70th), and mechanical engineering (79th).

IITM-Bangalore and IIT-Ahmedabad are also in the top 100 for their business and management programmes. Anna University and Jawaharlal Nehru University have also made it to the top-100, for petroleum engineering and anthropology, respectively.

Among the private universities, OP Jindal Global University has entered the global top-100 for law at 76th position. Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) has entered the rankings for pharmacy and pharmacology, securing a place in the 151-200 band. It has also entered the rankings for mathematics (451-500 band) and business and management studies (451-500 band).

Jamia Hamdard has entered the rankings for pharmacy and pharmacology (101-150), Manipal Academy of Higher Education for pharmacy and pharmacology (151-200), and Vellore Institute of Technology for electrical and electronic engineering (251-300 band).

Quacquarelli Symonds is a British company specialising in the analysis of higher education institutions around the world. The company was founded in 1990 by Nunzio Quacquarelli.

“‘It is our duty to bring to the notice of decision-makers in Qatar about the progress India is making in the field of Education and about India’s Institutions of Eminence which made good progress this year in the QS World University Rankings. We are well aware of the keenness of the Qatari leadership in welcoming world-class institutions into Qatar and in promoting only the best of educational practices. India is equally keen to maintain the quality of its education and the latest QS Rankings stand testimony to that,” the embassy said.

TNG students secure outstanding results in external examinations

In line with its mission and vision, The Next Generation School is committed to equipping students with essential life skills and ensuring that they are prepared for global challenges and higher education through external examinations. TNG holds a host of relevant external examinations that assess curricular effectiveness and confirm TNG’s alignment with national and international standards.

One such examination is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMMS) examination. Conducted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), Qatar, the assessment provides participants with a holistic understanding of student’s results by conducting international comparative assessment measuring student learning in reading, conducted every five years. In 2016, TNG students scored 548 in reading performance in the PIRLS, well above the average reading performance of 500 as set by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

The school also conducts the Cambridge English Young Learners (YLE) exam, which is designed to assess the English language skills of children aged between seven and twelve years old.

In addition, TNG students regularly sit for Cambridge Checkpoint, IGCSE, and A-Level examinations, securing outstanding results which provide assurance to their parents and teachers that they are ready to make the transition to higher education.

In the Summer 2019 session, 71 percent of appearing students at TNG secured A*-B, and 95 percent secured A*-C in the IGCSE examinations. Students also produced excellent results in AS Level examinations with 68 percent of students securing A, 87 percent securing A, and 100 percent of students securing A. Similarly, TNG students have displayed their capabilities being Highest in the Middle East for their IGCSE Islamiat examination for two years in a row as well as highest in the world in IGCSE Arabic as a second language too.

The school is now hoping for continued positive outcomes in this year’s external examinations and assessments.
The International School of London (ISL) Qatar has an outstanding track record for exceptional academic standards, renowned International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes and a remarkable record of admissions to the best universities worldwide.

ISL Qatar is part of the International School of London Group, which has a tradition of over 40 years of outstanding educational achievement in the UK. ISL was the first school in the UK to offer the IB Diploma Programme and has a history of placing students in top quality colleges and universities.

The International School of London (ISL) Qatar has developed a strong presence both locally and internationally as a pioneering educational institution for students between the ages of 3 and 18 since 2008.

WHAT MAKES ISL QATAR UNIQUE?

• Our Outstanding Mother Tongue Programme: ISL Qatar is the only school in Qatar to offer an integrated Mother Tongue Language Programme. Language development is vital for educational attainment and the school places great emphasis on its Mother Tongue and Language Programme. The language of instruction of the school is English. However, ISL also provides for non-native speakers, with classes in their Mother Tongue and for those students who require additional support – through our English Language Support (ELS) Programme. The school’s mother tongue Programme is widely recognised as a model for international schools. Mother tongue languages offered include: Arabic, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Serbian, Swedish, German, Italian, Dutch, Japanese, Turkish, Malay and Indonesian and many more. We are constantly adding more languages depending on student need and availability of provision.

• ISL Qatar has a truly international student body of over 1100 students from over 70 countries, and inspiring and passionate teachers from over 40 countries. A spacious, purpose-built campus with small class-sizes allow for personalized care and learning. The newly built swimming pool and outdoor classrooms are the recent addition to the ISL Qatar campus to help students connect with nature and to allow out-of-classroom experiences, especially during the pandemic.

VIRTUAL SCHOOL

As we transform our learning, embracing the virtual learning environment, it is imperative that the school continues to focus on inquiry, collaboration and connection while continuously designing learning experiences that are not dependent on physical space. ISL Qatar recognized the importance of a digital platform to enrich the learning experience before the pandemic and continues to deliver outstanding quality learning to its students.

ISL Qatar works closely with Microsoft and has recently participated in Microsoft Global Learning Connection where the students met with Anthony Salcito, VP of Education at Microsoft, as the only school in Qatar to do so. Minecraft, alongside Microsoft has become synonymous with the magic of creative learning at ISL Qatar. As one of the many dimensions of innovative collaboration, ISL Qatar has taken Minecraft to heart and seen wonderful opportunities to engage with learning from multiple perspectives. It is now an integral part of curriculum planning, development and delivery.

At a time when learning has taken on new perspectives, fresh dimensions and enlightened thinking – ISL Qatar has embraced these elements with aplomb. Students across the school have been afforded the opportunity to explore, take risks and engage with learning on their own terms.

As ISL Qatar continues to innovate, strives for creativity in learning and embraces an exploration of original learning concepts.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES & COMMUNITY SERVICE

Students have rich opportunities for academic, sporting, visual and performing arts and community service endeavours such as Week Without Walls (WWW), Model United Nations (MUN), World’s Scholar’s Cup and community service activities. During the pandemic, the school maintained its activities and community engagement through online events.

PASSPORT TO THE WORLD’S BEST UNIVERSITIES

As well as the IB Diploma, ISL Qatar offers a US High School Diploma (US HSD) to all students. The US HSD is fully accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and a member of the Council of International Schools (CIS). The academic strength of the IB Diploma is recognised by universities throughout the world. Graduates have been accepted into some of the world’s most prestigious universities in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, The Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, South Africa and Qatar to name a few.
The International School of London (ISL) Qatar has a truly international student body of over 1100 students from over 70 countries, and inspiring and passionate teachers from over 40 countries. A spacious, purpose-built campus with small class-sizes allow for personalized care and learning. The newly built swimming pool and outdoor classrooms are the recent additions to the ISL Qatar campus to help students connect with nature and to allow out-of-classroom experiences, especially during the pandemic.
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We are committed to developing the spirit of excellence and sound character in our students, through an innovative, well balanced international curriculum built around the standards of the US Common Core.

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