مؤسسة عبدالله الغرير للتعليم
Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education

**Keynote Address by Maysa Jalbout**
**Our Youth; Our Future: Continued Nation-Building and A Sustainable Future for our Emirati Youth**
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AlSalam Allaykum

Good morning, Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen

Your Excellency, Abdullah Sultain Al Owais, on behalf of our Founder, Abdulla Al Ghurair and our Chairman, His Excellency, Abdulaziz Al Ghurair, I thank you for your kind invitation to address this gathering of esteemed members of the Sharjah and the UAE community of government officials, educators, entrepreneurs, and youth.

I am humbled to be among such a distinguished group of individuals and established organizations, especially as I am here representing a very young organization – the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education. The forum, through your leadership and vision, is a recognized gathering of a wealth of experience – exactly the experience we at the Foundation hope to learn from and build upon as we seek innovative ideas and effective partnerships in support of Emirati youth.

It is befitting that we are gathered in Sharjah, the home of some the UAE's best education, arts and culture institutions. Institutions and initiatives, large and small from the American University of Sharjah to the Barjeel Art Foundation and to Sheraa are quickly gaining recognition and are putting Sharjah on the international map for being magnets for Emirati and Arab talent.

This is why we at the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education welcomed the high interest from our scholars to study in Sharjah. We are proud to confirm that in our inaugural year we placed the highest number of our scholarship recipients at the American University of Sharjah. Today, 60 young women and men from the UAE and 9 countries from across the region are Al Ghurair Scholars studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Math at AUS.

The diversity of the students, the adversity they have overcome and the success they are enjoying is a testament to the openness of AUS and the Emirate of Sharjah and the commitment to supporting youth from the UAE and the region.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, our Founder's journey in education philanthropy extends back to the 1960s, when his family built the first school in Masafi to educate and house children from the Northern Emirates. That school still stands as a testament of his humble but clear vision for what philanthropy can do. From those early days he believed educating Emirati youth was the most effective form of preparing them for the future, the future we are living in today.

Abdulla Al Ghurair may not have been able to anticipate what the education world would look like today but as a businessman he could see vast economic opportunity for his children and the generations to come.

The Foundation for was born out of what Abdulla Al Ghurair and his family - learned over 5 decades – that education and economic prosperity are deeply interdependent. The economic growth of the UAE must be matched by its education progress.

While the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education is the largest privately funded philanthropic entity in the Arab world and has a very ambitious target of providing 15,000 under-served high-achieving youth with high quality education opportunities, I am here to tell you that we cannot do it alone. No one entity can create large scale impact on its own.

For all the impressive progress the UAE has made in education – from almost eliminating illiteracy to increasing access, to achieving gender equality – it cannot afford to slow down. The struggle to improve learning outcomes, to connect graduates to the job market and to reinvent education for a fast changing world is a global struggle and the UAE is well-positioned to be among those who succeed.

We, at the Foundation are hopeful for many reasons but especially because Arab youth themselves are hopeful.

In fact, Arab youth are more hopeful about their education potential than youth anywhere else. A 2011 TIMSS study, which collects educational data from students across the whole world, found that Arab states took 8 out of the top 10 places in terms of students' academic ambitions in both math and science, with up to 62% of surveyed students stating that they plan to complete their postgraduate degrees.

PISA, another international education assessment, found that 15-year-old Arab students had some of the highest ambitions in the world when asked about the occupations they expect to have at the age of 30.

In summary, Youth in the Arab World, while diverse in many ways, share the same hunger for opportunity.
Nowhere in the region is opportunity more abundant, more promising and more likely to be transformative than in the UAE.

It's no wonder that for the 5th year in a row the UAE is the number one country of choice to live in according to the Arab Youth Survey. And the UAE is set to continue to be more attractive and responsive to youth with the strategic appointment of a young woman as the youth minister by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid.

The UAE, a young nation itself, will only continue to thrive in the future, if its children and youth thrive. With 34% of its population under the age of 25 coupled with the high rates of education completion, the UAE is well positioned to bear the fruits of what economists term as an "economic gift".

Yet, as the UAE readies its youth to venture on the path of reaping the benefit of its most valuable economic gift, the goal post of what it means to be 'ready' is constantly moving further afield.

The rapid evolution of information technology has ushered in a new industrial era giving way to a fundamentally different way of life and work than the region has been preparing its youth for.

In our globalized world, technology has eased communication, travel, as well as access to and exchange of ideas and information. Technology has altered our day-to-day interactions and relationships in previously unimaginable ways making the world a much smaller and more connected place.

Through social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, everyone has a voice. The growth in online collective action has also spurred the rise of "crowd-based' activities and initiatives, where individuals with shared interests can introduce changes in their societies.

But, how is technology changing the way we teach, learn and work? How can we make sure youth are equipped to benefit from these changes?

We believe that we can only move forward, perhaps even leapfrog forward, by recognizing five major trends.

**First Trend: Longer Working Lives Necessitates Lifelong Learning and Master Learning**

With growing health awareness and improved medical treatments, people are living longer than at any point in history. In some countries we've seen a rise in life expectancy of almost 30 years during the 20$^{th}$ century. People are therefore spending longer years working. This means that learning cannot end with our time in school; individuals need to be empowered to take charge of their learning throughout life. They will no longer be

expected acquire specialized skills in one specific area, but rather need to become transdisciplinarians- experts in combinations of specializations, forming new fields.

**Second Trend: More Automation Is Generating New High Skills Jobs**

In the context of the job market, technology has been both a destructive and creative force. As traditional jobs in the fields of transport, logistics, manufacturing, construction and others become increasingly more automated, there will be a greater demand for roles that require skills such as "creativity, intuition, persuasion, and imaginative problem-solving", jobs in the fields of education and community service, arts and media, science and technology, and finance.

**Third Trend: Growth in Big Data and Research and Development Requires STEM Education**

The explosion of the data analytics field has seen a rise in demand for higher order analytical skills, advanced digital literacy, as well as strengths in new disciplines of the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), including computer programming.

**Fourth Trend: Greater Access to Information Makes Media Literacy Critical**

The rise of new forms of media is changing the nature of learning, communicating and our perception of the world. Gaming, animation, and other forms of virtual networks are demanding new models of collaboration and communication. Not only does our education system need to better respond to this new reality, we also need to ensure that young people are able to navigate this new space safely and more critically.

**Fifth Trend: Working in an Increasingly Interconnected World**

As the nature of work is changing so are the structures of organizations shifting towards being increasingly interconnected. They are also becoming more diverse not only in their make up, but also in their operations. This, in turn, means that workers are expected to become more adaptable to changing environments, have an awareness of different cultures and know how to work and communicate in virtual environments.

**Put simply, information technology has shifted the learning goal post, requiring Emirati and Arab youth not only to master basic skills, such as numeracy and literacy but to demonstrate adaptability, creativity and an ability to learn continuously.**

It therefore falls on us to **re-imagine how youth learn and develop skills in today's world so that they are prepared for a very different future than ours**.

We at the Foundation are trying to learn from the best examples and are prepared to work together to adapt the success stories to the needs of Emirati youth.

I would like to share with you just three ways in which higher education in the UAE and the Arab world can respond to the changing nature of teaching, learning and working.

**First – by building work experience into the curriculum through cooperative programs.**

While internships are valuable, formally accredited work experiences developed with employers who are equally committed to the success of the student are far superior. University Co-op programs have a significant positive impact on student labor market outcomes, including shorter length of job search, higher starting salaries and career advancement.

In Canada and the US, undergraduate Co-op students at top universities can make over 50,000 USD while still in university and get credit for it. At the same time, on average co-op students can earn 15% more than their peers when they formally enter the labor market.

One study showed that 87% of co-op graduates were employed in jobs directly related to their college program compared to only 53% of the regular program graduates.

Coop programs have also shown a significant impact on acquiring important 21st Century skills such as students' problem solving abilities, critical thinking and intuition.

At the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, we have begun collaborating with universities with deep expertise in Coop. Not only do we hope to begin placing students in the best Coop programs such as at the University of Waterloo in Canada where top multinationals recruit students in high numbers, but we also hope to facilitate the adoption of this model in the region with our partner universities and interested private sector companies.

**Second - by adopting a co-curricular education model**

It is common knowledge that student involvement in extracurricular activities enhances the overall university experience and helps students gain important skills. Most common forms of extra-curricular activities include Student Government, Athletics, Volunteer and Service Learning.

Studies show that participation in student clubs is correlated with improved satisfaction with college and higher retention rates, increased confidence in academic ability, and a stronger drive.

A study by Purdue University goes further to show that while the GPA of students involved in student clubs is higher than non-members; GPA of students who take on leadership positions in clubs is even higher than that of student club members.

In a study at Imperial College, 70% of businesses surveyed indicated that extra-curriculars make job seekers stand out amongst other candidates and 66% of businesses surveyed say that employees with extra-curriculars are more successful and gain promotions faster.

From our own experience with our STEM Scholars, we found that while student's first reaction suggests they do not have time for extracurricular activities, if they experience them early on, they are likely to persist and invest more productive time engaging.

Ensuring that students reap the benefits of engaging in extra-curricular activities, including community service and volunteering, should not however be limited to scholarship students nor should it be completely separate from their academic curricula.

Admittedly, the co-curricular approach, where extra-curricular activities are crafted to complement the theory being delivered in the classroom is not wide-spread but where it has taken hold, it is showing great results and top universities are taking note.

This is why we have chosen to place some of our top scholars this coming year with a new small university called Minerva, where students will reside and learn in a different city every semester. In each city, students will be pushed to take advantage of what the city has to offer on a weekly basis through attending work sessions, collaborating with civic organizations and engaging with prominent cultural figures. Examples of co-curricular organized by the university include visits to local homeless shelters, interviews with start-up CEOs, understanding the local transportation infrastructure, and exploring historic landmarks.

**Third – by adopting online and blended teaching and learning techniques to maximize learning outcomes**

Some of the world's top universities have adopted blended learning, which is a combination of online and face-to-face education, for significantly improving learning outcomes, and particularly in STEM subjects.

For example, Elements of Structures, an introductory MIT course on the strength of materials, used to be run traditionally in the classroom.
In 2013, it was turned into a blended course (a combination of online and face-to-face). The professor was able to introduce several new tasks such as solving a problem set, watching explainer videos, and thus save time in the classroom for lecture, demos, interactive exercises, and student discussion. The impact on the grades was significant.

In Fall 2012, only 50% of the class scored at least an 80%. One year later, 87% of the class got 80% and above (also 50% of students had a 90% or more as compared to only 10% the year earlier).

Another example is from a study of a circuits and electronics course offered at San Jose State University, where significant improvements were observed following the

introduction of the blended model, including a drastic decline in student failure rates from 41 percent to 9 percent.

In both examples, these improved learning outcomes came about because using technology provided for a number of structural changes such as shifting away from teacher-led lectures to watching short video tutorials followed by interactive exercises allowing students to practice concepts as soon as they are taught. Students were also able to pace themselves, focusing on areas of difficulty or going ahead in sections that they mastered already.

Equally important is assessment, which can be integrated into the technology. Rather than have teachers mark piles of quizzes and assignments over a week, students got their results instantly, allowing them to correct their mistakes on-the-spot and in the process ensuring that they mastered all concepts before going ahead to new ones.

These learning outcomes are compelling enough that at the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, we are collaborating with MIT and coordinating with the Ministry of Higher Education on the most effective ways to learn from MIT's experience in online learning and in turn help build expertise in universities in the UAE.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I have shared with you the trends that we believe are re-shaping the ways we teach, learn, and work. I have also highlighted three higher education initiatives - cooperative education, co-curricular learning and blended learning – that would help better prepare Emirati youth for jobs of the future.

The pace and magnitude of the changes that Emirati youth will need to adapt to requires bold and innovative education approaches and a relentless focus on results. Together, we hope to chart a new path for collaboration between private philanthropy, government, employers and the education community in the UAE and beyond. Thank you.