

# Top schools offer study with a regional twist

Big providers are responding to demands from students, finds Steve Coomber

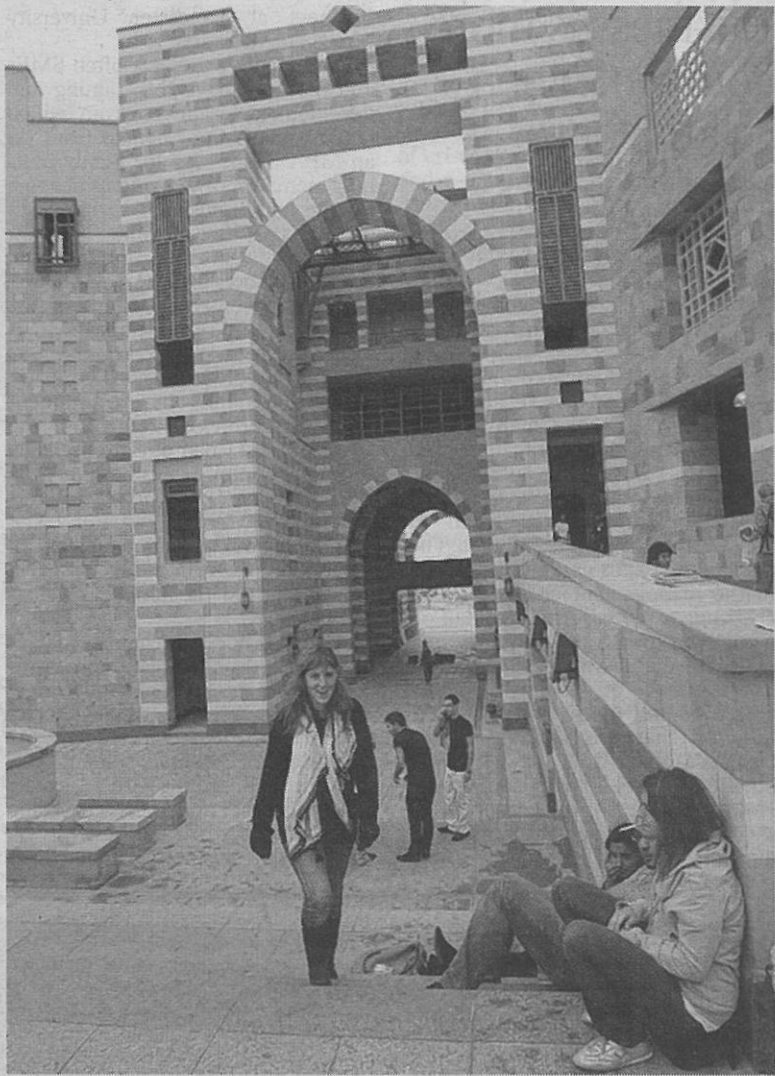
The Middle East and North Africa is dominating the headlines as political unrest sweeps through countries in the region. But there has been another kind of revolution in the area over recent years — an economic revolution, together with a drive to deliver more and better business education. Many MBA providers responded to the business boom in the Middle East by launching a variety of qualifications there. And, despite the turmoil, there is little sign of their enthusiasm waning.

Types of MBA programme available vary, as do delivery methods. Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University (EBS), for example, offers students in the Middle East the opportunity to study for an MBA either through independent distance learning, via approved local learning partners, or at Heriot-Watt's Dubai campus for those students who prefer more contact time with tutors and classmates.

Alick Kitchin, EBS's business director, says: "We have our strategic partner EBS Arabworld with offices in Beirut, a number of local partners like the American University in Cairo, and our own campus in Dubai. About 60 per cent of students study with a partner and the rest through distance learning."

The UAE is a particularly popular destination for MBA providers. Cass Business School in London launched an Executive MBA (EMBA) from the International Finance Centre in Dubai in 2007, while Manchester Business School (MBS) has a base in the Dubai Knowledge Village.

Participants tend to be a mix of local people and expatriates working in the region. The 60 or so students



Edinburgh Business School has links with the American University in Cairo

joining the Cass EMBA each year represent about 30 nationalities. On the MBS programme just over half the students live and work in the UAE, with the rest elsewhere in the Middle East, primarily in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

The business schools emphasise that their students receive effectively the same MBA qualification as that delivered on their main campus, with the same accredited structure, often delivered by the same faculty, flown out for the purpose.

There are some differences, however. Programme relevance for students working locally is an issue schools try hard to address. Ehsan Razavizadeh, the regional director at Cass, says: "One challenge was using regional case studies — something the students demanded."

"We developed some very good examples, featuring major companies in Dubai and the UAE and that adds a lot of value."

"We also try to tailor the electives. So, for example, ours include Islamic finance and energy, focusing on oil and gas, real estate and entrepreneurship."

Inevitably, the disturbances have affected programme delivery in some cases. The extent of the impact largely depends on location. The American University in Cairo, for example, one of EBS's partners, is located in Tahir Square, a focal point for the demonstrations. As a result, says Kitchin, the university has relocated its administrative functions, and any student who wishes to take time out and

return to their studies when the situation becomes calmer can do so. The school's teaching centre in Dubai remains unaffected.

Despite the unrest, business schools remain committed to the region and confident about long term prospects. HEC Paris launched an EMBA in Doha, Qatar, in February. Bernard Ramanantsoa, the dean, says: "In Qatar and this part of the world there are impressive forecasts

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for growth, especially in education."

With the growth of business education provision far more people in the region now have access to an MBA. Increasingly, it seems that the business schools are helping students in the Middle East realise their career aspirations and creating a new generation of business leaders.

"I was an employee when I started the programme," says Bhavani Suresh, a Manchester Business School MBA and now chief executive of Nbiz Infosol, an information solutions company.

"I started my own business and today we are a \$1.5 million company with branches in India and the head office in Abu Dhabi."

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circles," he says. "You start with the faculty who you are initially trying to inspire and reassure. Then there are the current and potential students. Next are the alumni, and I also have to consider our other locations."

CEIBS has a campus in Beijing and, intriguingly, in Accra, Ghana, from which 40 EMBA students have recently graduated. "It is a very important statement of the international nature of the school," Quelch says.

As well as Africa, where China is investing heavily, the capacity for growth in the Chinese market is obvious. With more than 30,000 students on 184 MBA programmes, Chinese business schools are beginning to tap the massive potential of their domestic market. The growing global economic power of China is also likely to attract more foreign students to the country. The global dean is likely to feel at home.