



# HIGHER EDUCATION

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**GULF TIMES** Special Supplement

## Qatar strengthens position as a pioneer in education excellence

**Q**atar is steadily reinforcing its reputation as a regional leader in higher education, with continued investment, world-class academic partnerships, and a strategic focus on innovation positioning the country at the forefront of educational excellence.

This progress is further underscored by a recent report from international market research firm Report Cube, which projects Qatar's overall education market to grow from \$7.5bn in 2025 to \$13.22bn by 2034, registering a compound annual growth rate of 6.5% during 2026–2034. The report attributes this expansion to sustained government investment, rising enrolment, increasing private and international school participation, and the accelerated adoption of digital learning solutions.

Within this broader growth trajectory, higher education is emerging as one of Qatar's strongest pillars, driven by the country's long-term commitment to building a knowledge-based economy under Qatar National Vision 2030.

Qatar's education ecosystem has evolved significantly over the past two decades, distinguished by its ability to combine international academic standards with national development priorities. The country has established itself as a unique educational destination through strategic partnerships with globally renowned universities, many of which operate from Education City.

These institutions have helped create an academic environment that offers students access to internationally recognised degrees, advanced research opportunities, and interdisciplinary learning experiences without leaving the region. This pioneering model has not only elevated educational quality but also positioned Qatar as a hub for intellectual exchange and academic collaboration.

According to Report Cube, higher education in Qatar continues to expand steadily, supported by global university campuses and growing research initiatives. The report notes that digital transformation is playing an increasingly important role in reshaping education delivery, with online and blended learning models becoming more integrated across academic institutions.

This digital evolution reflects Qatar's broader emphasis on educational innovation. Universities across the country are leveraging advanced learning management systems, artificial intelligence-powered tools, and interactive digital platforms to enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement.

Quality assurance remains central to this growth. Qatar's regulatory framework ensures strict curriculum standards, accreditation requirements, and institutional accountability, reinforcing confidence in the country's higher education offerings. This robust governance structure has helped maintain high academic standards while encouraging continuous improvement.

Research and innovation are also defining features of Qatar's higher education landscape. Universities are increasingly contributing to national priorities through specialised research in areas such as sustainability, healthcare, energy, artificial intelligence, and technology development.

At the same time, institutions are strengthening links with industry to ensure graduates are equipped with skills relevant to evolving labour market demands. This focus on workforce readiness is particularly critical as Qatar continues diversifying its economy beyond hydrocarbons.

The Report Cube study also highlights the growing role of digital learning and international curricula as major market trends. These developments are especially relevant to higher education, where flexibility, accessibility, and global competitiveness are becoming essential components of academic success.

Another emerging opportunity lies in postgraduate education, executive learning, and professional certification programmes, all of which are gaining momentum as lifelong learning becomes increasingly important in a rapidly changing global economy.

As Qatar's education market moves toward the projected \$13.22bn mark by 2034, the higher education sector is expected to remain a cornerstone of this growth.

### Ministry set to document education history in Qatar

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has called on all the persons who have copies of the old school textbooks to submit them to the ministry so it would archive them electronically and return the textbooks back to them.

The move is aimed at preserving the history of education in Qatar, where the old school curriculums and textbooks will be saved electronically to document the progress of education in Qatar throughout the years. This will be part of maintaining and preserving the national educational heritage and give the future generations the opportunity to explore the development of education throughout the past years in the country.

The ministry called on the public to share the old school textbooks, previous editions of the school curriculums, and any materials related to these. Besides, the Ministry affirmed that the submitted materials, books and others will be returned intact after copying them, and they will be dealt with according to the highest standard of care. The participants will be honoured and if they wish a reference to them will be made.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION

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# Northwestern Qatar celebrates the Class of 2026 at its 15th graduation ceremony



The Class of 2026 at Northwestern University in Qatar's 15th annual graduation ceremony, held at Raffles Doha.

**N**orthwestern University in Qatar celebrated the graduation of the Class of 2026 at its 15th annual ceremony, held at Raffles Doha on May 4.

The event brought together university leadership, faculty, staff, families, and distinguished guests to honor the achievements of 123 graduates who now join Northwestern's global alumni community.

The Class of 2026 represents a diverse and resilient cohort, shaped by a period of regional uncertainty and global change.

The graduating class includes students from 22 countries, who majored in communication and journalism, with many completing interdisciplinary minors across artificial intelligence and media, strategic communication, Middle East studies, and joint programs within Education City.

Thirty-two graduates were recognized with Dean's Scholastic Honors.



Dean and CEO Marwan M. Kraidy addresses the Class of 2026, reflecting on muruna, or resilience with purpose, as a guiding principle for navigating an uncertain world.

In his address, Marwan M. Kraidy, dean and CEO of Northwestern Qatar, reflected on the Arabic concept of muruna, or resilience with purpose.

"Muruna is not simply flexibility," he said. "It is the ability to remain grounded, principled, and engaged, especially when the world around you is uncertain."

Kraidy encouraged graduates to approach their future with intention and responsibility, emphasizing that storytelling carries both meaning and consequence.

"Words and images are not neutral. They shape perception, memory, and possibility," he noted.

He noted that graduates are entering a world shaped by rapid geopolitical, technological, and social change, and emphasized that their education has prepared them not only to navigate complexity, but to engage with it meaningfully.

"Our mission has never been simply to train professionals," Kraidy said. "It has been to cultivate evidence-based storytellers who can understand complexity and contribute to making the world a better place."

Delivering the graduation address, Dr. Majed Mohammed Al-Ansari, advisor to the Prime Minister and official spokesperson for Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spoke about the evolving role of communication in a complex media landscape.

Reflecting on his experience moving from academia into public service, he emphasized the growing responsibility that comes with having a voice.

"Your words will travel faster than your intentions, and being articulate is no longer enough, you must be responsible," he said.

He urged students to remain grounded in truth and integrity amid increasing pressure for speed and visibility.

"It used to be: Who got it right? Now it is often: Who got there first, or who made the most noise?" he said, cautioning against the pull of immediacy over accuracy.

Joining the ceremony, Northwestern University Provost-Elect Erik Luitjen addressed the graduates and highlighted the strength and resilience of the class.

He noted that the cohort represents a truly international community prepared to engage across cultures and disciplines.

"Northwestern students are strong, creative, and resilient," Luitjen said.

"You have the capacity to make positive change in our increasingly complicated world," he said, encouraging graduates to take thoughtful risks and remain open to new perspectives.



Dr. Majed Mohammed Al-Ansari delivers the graduation address, emphasizing the responsibility of communication and the impact of words in shaping public understanding.



Northwestern University Provost-Elect Erik Luitjen addresses the graduating class, recognizing their resilience and encouraging them to lead with openness and intention.



Isra Fejzullaj reflects on growth, resilience, and storytelling. Her remarks captured a defining sentiment of the class: that growth is not about having all the answers.

Luitjen was appointed Provost in January and will assume the role later this spring. He is the Liu-Wang Liming Professor of Materials Science and Engineering in Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering.

Student speaker Isra Fejzullaj reflected on the shared journey of the class, shaped by uncertainty, growth, and perseverance.

Drawing on both personal and collective experiences, she spoke about learning to navigate ambiguity and finding strength in community.

"We learned that progress does not look perfect, and that some of the most important lessons were not scheduled or easy," she said.

She also emphasized the responsibility that comes with storytelling, urging her peers to remain intentional in how they represent others and the world around them.

The celebration extended beyond the ceremony through a series of citywide activations across Doha, including Al Jaber Towers and the Halo Screen at Msheireb Downtown, allowing the wider community to take part in honoring the Class of 2026.

The ceremony marked a significant milestone for the graduates, who now step into professional and academic paths across journalism, communication, research, and a variety of emerging fields. As they leave Northwestern Qatar, they do so with a shared commitment to curiosity, responsibility, and impact.



# Congratulations Class of 2026

The Board of Trustees, President Bienen, Dean Marwan M. Kraidy, faculty, and staff of Northwestern University in Qatar wish the Class of 2026 success in their future endeavors.

Abdallah Haroun Sarhan	Hissa Saleh Al-Mana	Musaed Saad Al-Muhannadi
Abdulla Abdulaziz Al-Attiyah	Houra Hussain Haji	Najiya Mohammed Al-Kuwari
Abdulla Rashid Al-Kuwari	Iman Elmoctar	Najlaa Mohammed Al-Muhannadi
Abdullatif Mashari Al-Mana	Isra Fejzullaj	Nawaf Ahmed Al-Kubaisi
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Dana Ahmad Al-Marzouqi	Mansoor Ahmed Al-Khater	Pinyi Zeng
Dana Mabrouk Ziani	Maryam Abdulhakeem Mostafawi	Raghd Ibrahim Al-Suwaidi
Dana Tarek Saber	Maryam Abdulla Al-Thani	Rahaf Khalid Al-Boinin
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Fatima Rashid Al-Khater	Mehul Bhattacharya	Sara Khamis Al-Muraikhi
Fayiqah Adel Bodai	Mohamed Abdelkreem	Sara Qassim Al-Mahmoud
Geer Chen	Mohammed Fahad Al-Emadi	Shouq Mohammed Al-Ali
Ghada Khalid Al-Kaabi	Mohammed Khalid Almana	Shrijan Raj Pandey
Ghalya Mana Al-Hajri	Mona Hammoudi	Talyta Venancio Franca
Hala Yousef Al-Ansari	Moza Faysel Al-Harami	Thaneesha Vashishta
Hannah Ahmad AlMannai	Mubarak Faisal Al-Thani	Thani Feisal Al-Thani
Haya Abdulaziz Al-Thani	Mubarak Ghanim AlNaimi	Ting-Wei Wu
Haya Nasser Kano	Mubarak Mohammed AlNaimi	Umme Tasmeha
Hiba Sobaii	Mubashir Hanif	Wadha Ali Abaalzamat
Hissa Abdulrahman Al-Obaidan	Mudawi Bader Al-Mana	Yousef Ahmed Al-Hammadi

# BEYOND THE LECTURE HALL

As higher education evolves beyond traditional classrooms, flexibility, accessibility, and student-driven expectations are reshaping how, when, and where learning takes place

**H**igher education is undergoing a profound transformation—one that is reshaping not just how students learn, but what they expect from their academic experience. The traditional model of fixed schedules, physical classrooms, and standardised delivery is steadily giving way to a more flexible, accessible, and student-centric approach.

Today's learners are no longer confined to lecture halls. Instead, they navigate a dynamic ecosystem where digital platforms, hybrid classrooms, and personalised learning paths redefine the meaning of education.

## A shift toward flexibility

Flexibility has become a defining feature of modern higher education. Students increasingly seek programmes that adapt to their schedules, professional commitments, and personal circumstances. This shift is particularly evident in the growing popularity of online and blended learning models, which combine in-person instruction with digital coursework.



Universities are responding by offering modular programmes, part-time degrees, and self-paced learning options. These formats allow students to progress at their own speed, revisit recorded lectures, and access course materials anytime, anywhere.

In countries like Qatar, where a diverse student population includes working professionals and international learners, such flexibility is not just a convenience—it is a necessity. Institutions are increasingly designing programmes that cater to this diversity, enabling broader participation in higher education.

## Expanding accessibility

Accessibility is another cornerstone of this transformation. Advances in educational technology have broken down geographical and financial barriers, opening doors to learners who might previously have been excluded.

Digital platforms, virtual classrooms, and cloud-based resources have made it possible for students to access world-class education without relocating. This is particularly significant in globally connected academic hubs such as Education City, where international universities extend their reach through hybrid and online offerings.

Moreover, accessibility is no longer limited to physical access. Universities are placing greater emphasis on inclusive design—ensuring that learning materials are available in multiple formats, supporting students with disabilities, and accommodating different learning styles.

Scholarships, financial aid, and flexible payment options further contribute to widening access, making higher education more attainable for a broader segment of society.



## The rise of the digital campus

The concept of a "digital campus" is rapidly gaining traction. Learning management systems, AI-driven tools, and interactive platforms are transforming how knowledge is delivered and consumed.

Students now engage with multimedia content, participate in virtual discussions, and collaborate across borders in real time. Recorded lectures, digital libraries, and online assessments have become integral components of the learning experience.

This evolution has also redefined the role of educators. Professors are no longer just lecturers; they are facilitators, mentors, and content curators who guide students through an increasingly complex information landscape.

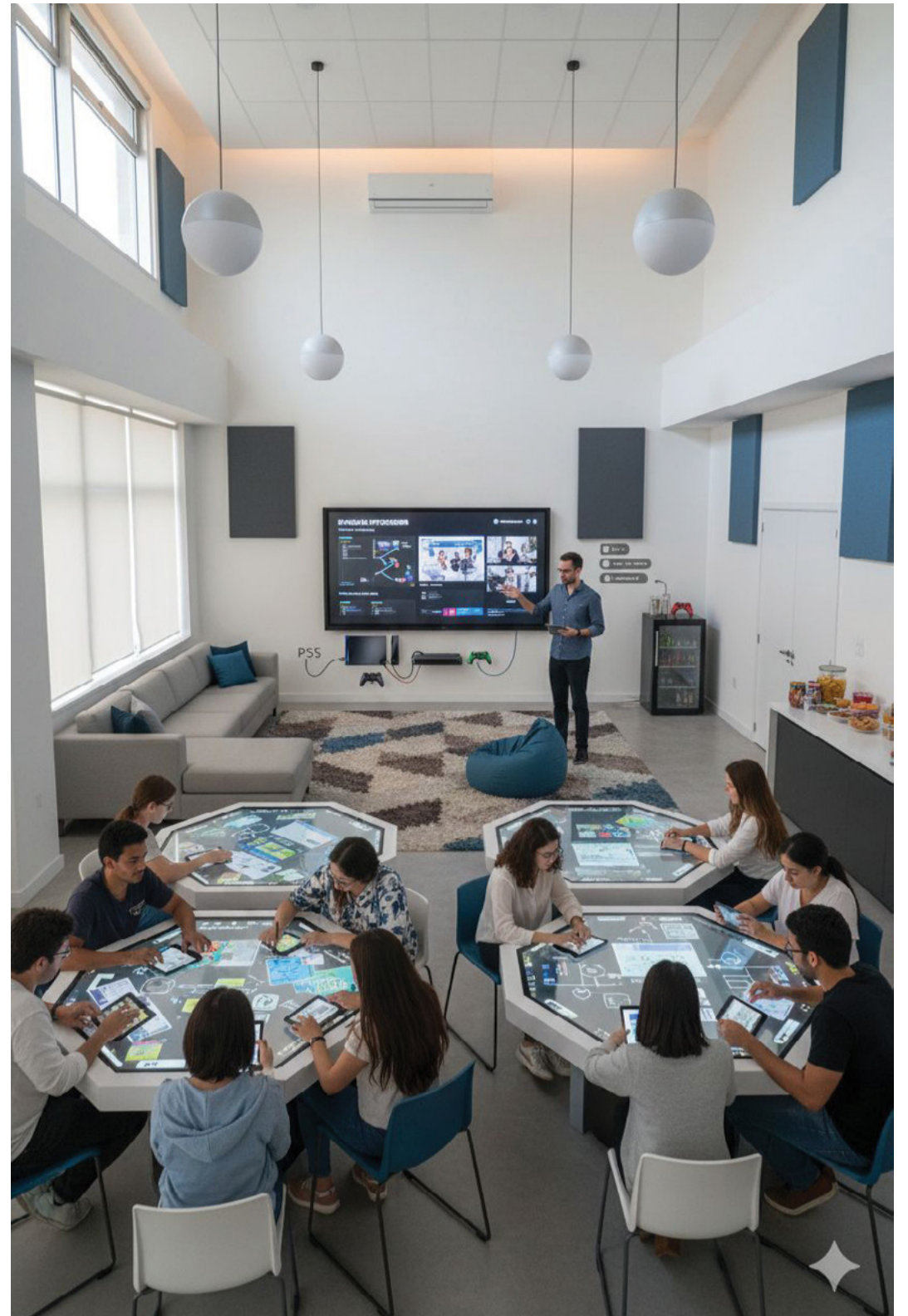
## Changing student expectations

Perhaps the most significant driver of change is the evolving mindset of students themselves. Today's learners are more informed, more connected, and more outcome-oriented than ever before.

They expect:

- **Relevance:** Courses that align with real-world skills and industry demands
- **Personalisation:** Learning experiences tailored to their interests and career goals
- **Interactivity:** Engaging, technology-driven teaching methods
- **Support:** Strong academic, mental health, and career guidance services

Students are also placing greater value on experiential learning—internships, research opportunities, and industry collaborations that bridge the gap between theory and practice.



This shift is pushing universities to rethink curriculum design, assessment methods, and student engagement strategies.

## Lifelong learning and upskilling

Higher education is no longer a one-time phase; it is becoming a lifelong journey. As industries evolve and new technologies emerge, the need for continuous learning is more critical than ever.



Short courses, micro-credentials, and professional certifications are gaining popularity, allowing individuals to upskill or reskill without committing to full degree programmes. This trend aligns closely with national development strategies such as Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasise human capital development and workforce readiness.

Universities are increasingly partnering with industry to offer targeted training programmes that address specific skill gaps, ensuring that graduates remain competitive in a rapidly changing job market.

Despite its many advantages, the shift beyond the lecture hall is not without challenges. Ensuring quality and academic integrity in online learning, addressing the digital divide, and maintaining student engagement in virtual environments remain key concerns. Institutions must also invest in faculty training, digital infrastructure, and robust support systems to fully realise the potential of flexible and accessible education.

## Redefining the university experience

The future of higher education lies in its ability to adapt. The lecture hall is no longer the sole centre of learning—it is just one part of a broader, more interconnected ecosystem.

As flexibility and accessibility continue to shape the sector, universities that embrace innovation and prioritise student needs will be best positioned to thrive.

In this new era, education is not defined by where it happens, but by how effectively it empowers learners to succeed—anytime, anywhere.

# CULTURE, SPORTS, AND STUDENT COMMUNITIES

## The softer side of higher education

Modern universities are increasingly moving away from a purely academic identity to become vibrant, multidimensional communities

**H**igher education is often measured by academic rankings, research output, and employability outcomes. Yet, an equally important dimension lies beyond classrooms and laboratories—the lived experience of students on campus. Today, campus life is being reimagined as universities place greater emphasis on culture, sports, wellness, and community engagement, recognising that holistic development is central to student success.

Modern universities are increasingly moving away from a purely academic identity to become vibrant, multidimensional communities. The focus is no longer just on producing graduates, but on shaping well-rounded individuals equipped with social skills, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness.

This shift reflects a broader understanding that education is most effective when intellectual growth is balanced with personal development. Students are encouraged to participate in activities that build confidence, leadership, and collaboration—skills that are just as important as academic achievement in the real world.

One of the most defining features of contemporary universities is cultural diversity. Campuses today bring together students from different nationalities, languages, and traditions, creating a unique environment of global interaction.

In international education hubs such as Education City, this diversity is particularly visible. Students experience a blend of cultures through festivals, student clubs, and community events that celebrate heritage and promote cross-cultural understanding.

Cultural societies play a key role in this ecosystem, organising events ranging from national day celebrations to international food festivals and art exhibitions. These activities not only preserve cultural identity but also foster mutual respect and global awareness among students.

## Sports as a unifying force

Sports have become a cornerstone of campus life, serving as both a recreational outlet and a platform for building teamwork and resilience.



Universities are investing heavily in sports infrastructure, including stadiums, fitness centres, and recreational facilities, to encourage active participation.

Inter-university tournaments, intramural leagues, and fitness programmes are now integral parts of student life. Whether it is football, basketball, athletics, or emerging sports like esports, these activities create a sense of belonging and healthy competition.

In addition to physical health benefits, sports play a crucial role in developing leadership skills, discipline, and teamwork—qualities that extend far beyond the playing field.



**Student communities and social engagement**

Student-led communities are at the heart of vibrant campus life. Clubs and societies—ranging from academic groups to creative arts, volunteering, and entrepreneurship—provide platforms for students to explore interests outside their formal studies.

These communities foster collaboration and peer learning, allowing students to connect over shared passions and goals. Leadership roles within student organisations also help develop organisational and communication skills that are essential in professional life.

Volunteering and social impact initiatives are gaining momentum as well. Students are increasingly engaging in community service projects, environmental campaigns, and social awareness programmes, reflecting a growing sense of civic responsibility.



**Wellbeing and mental health support**

As academic pressures intensify, universities are placing greater emphasis on student wellbeing. Mental health services, counselling centres, and wellness programmes are becoming standard features of campus life.

Institutions are recognising that student success depends not only on academic performance but also on emotional and psychological wellbeing. Wellness initiatives such as mindfulness sessions, stress management workshops, and peer support groups are helping students navigate the challenges of university life.

This holistic approach ensures that students are supported both academically and personally, creating a healthier and more balanced campus environment.

**Community building**

Modern universities are increasingly acting as community builders, where interaction extends beyond formal education. Campus events, cultural festivals, sports days, and public lectures create opportunities for engagement between students, faculty, and the wider community.

This sense of community is particularly strong in institutions that function as international hubs, where students from different backgrounds live and learn together in shared spaces. The result is a dynamic environment that mirrors the interconnected nature of today's global society.

Campus life today is shaping a new generation of students who are more socially aware, culturally sensitive, and personally engaged. Identity is no longer defined solely by academic achievement, but by a combination of experiences, interests, and values developed throughout university life.

Students are graduating not just with degrees, but with memories, friendships, and life skills that shape their future pathways. These experiences often prove just as influential as formal education in determining career success and personal growth.

As universities continue to evolve, the softer side of higher education is gaining the recognition it deserves. Culture, sports, and student communities are no longer peripheral—they are central to the university experience.

In reimagining campus life, institutions are creating environments where students can thrive academically, socially, and personally. This balanced approach is redefining what it means to be a student in the 21st century.

Ultimately, the future of higher education is not only about what students learn, but also about how they live, grow, and connect during their journey on campus.

# BUILDING KNOWLEDGE ECONOMIES FOR THE FUTURE

Higher education is undergoing one of its most significant transformations in modern history. Across the world, universities are no longer viewed solely as institutions of learning and research—they are increasingly positioned as strategic engines of economic development, innovation, and national competitiveness.

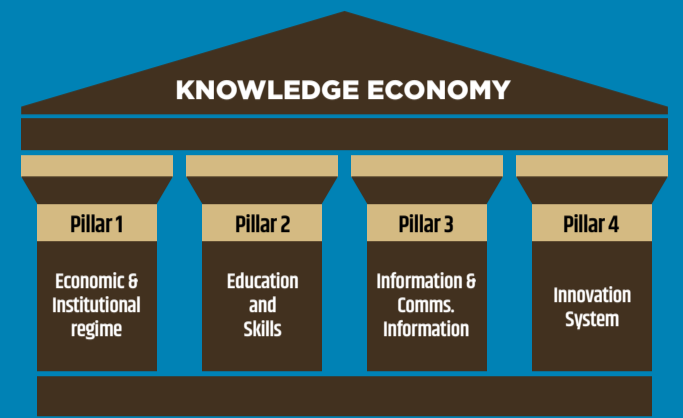
As economies shift from resource-based and industrial models toward knowledge-driven systems, governments are rethinking the role of higher education. The result is a global recalibration in which universities are being aligned more closely with labour markets, innovation ecosystems, and long-term national development goals.

The concept of a knowledge economy is now central to economic planning in both developed and emerging nations. In this model, value creation is driven by skills, innovation, research, and technology rather than traditional physical resources.

Countries are investing heavily in education systems that can produce highly skilled graduates, foster research breakthroughs, and support entrepreneurship. Universities have become critical infrastructure in this transformation—on par with transportation networks or energy systems in terms of national importance.

In this context, higher education is no longer an isolated sector. It is deeply embedded in broader strategies for economic diversification, digital transformation, and workforce development.

Globally, universities are evolving into multi-functional institutions that go far beyond teaching. They are now expected to contribute directly to economic growth through research commercialisation, startup incubation, and industry collaboration.



Artificial intelligence is also being integrated into teaching, from personalised learning systems to automated assessment tools. These innovations are making education more efficient, adaptive, and student-centred.

**Research, Innovation, and Economic Diversification**

Research is becoming a central pillar of national economic strategies. Governments are investing in universities as hubs of scientific discovery and technological advancement, with a focus on areas that support economic diversification.

Collaboration between universities, industry, and government is essential in this process. These partnerships help ensure that research outcomes are not only academically significant but also commercially and socially impactful.

From clean energy solutions to biomedical advancements, universities are increasingly contributing to solving real-world challenges while supporting national priorities.

Despite significant progress, the transition toward knowledge-based higher education systems is not without challenges. Funding constraints, unequal access, and disparities in research capacity remain key issues in many regions.



In many countries, university research parks, innovation districts, and incubators are driving new business creation. These ecosystems help translate academic research into market-ready products and services, strengthening ties between academia and industry.

For example, global education hubs such as Education City demonstrate how universities can operate as integrated ecosystems where education, research, and innovation converge. Such models reflect a broader global trend toward campus-based innovation economies.

One of the most visible shifts in higher education is the growing emphasis on employability. Governments and institutions are working closely with industries to ensure that academic programmes align with evolving labour market demands.

Fields such as artificial intelligence, data science, renewable energy, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing are increasingly prioritised in curricula. At the same time, soft skills—such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability—are being embedded across disciplines.

Vocational and technical education is also gaining renewed importance. Once seen as secondary to academic degrees, these pathways are now recognised as essential to filling skills gaps in modern economies.

This alignment is particularly relevant in countries pursuing long-term development frameworks such as Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasises human capital development as a pillar of economic diversification.

Higher education has become increasingly globalised, with students, faculty, and institutions crossing borders more than ever before. International branch campuses, joint degrees, and cross-border research collaborations are now common features of the academic landscape.

Countries are positioning themselves as education hubs to attract international students and institutions. This not only generates economic benefits but also enhances cultural exchange and knowledge transfer.

The presence of global universities in regions such as the Gulf, Asia, and Europe reflects a competitive race to become centres of academic excellence and innovation.

Technology is a key driver of change in higher education. The rise of digital learning platforms, artificial intelligence, and data-driven education systems is reshaping how knowledge is delivered and consumed.

Hybrid and online learning models have expanded access to education, enabling students to study from anywhere while balancing professional and personal commitments. Universities are increasingly adopting flexible delivery formats to meet diverse learner needs.

There is also ongoing debate about balancing academic independence with economic priorities. While alignment with industry needs is important, universities must also preserve their role as spaces for critical thinking and intellectual exploration.

Ensuring inclusivity is another major challenge. As higher education becomes more technologically advanced, there is a risk of widening gaps between those with access to digital tools and those without.

**The future**

Looking ahead, higher education is expected to become even more integrated into national development strategies. Universities will likely function as hybrid institutions—part education provider, part innovation hub, and part economic driver.

Micro-credentials, lifelong learning programmes, and modular degrees will become more common as individuals continuously upskill throughout their careers. The traditional model of education as a one-time phase of life is steadily being replaced by continuous learning pathways.

Countries that successfully align their higher education systems with economic transformation will be better positioned to compete in a global knowledge-driven economy.



The transition of higher education into a driver of knowledge economies marks a fundamental shift in how societies value learning and innovation. Universities are no longer peripheral institutions—they are central to shaping economic futures, driving technological progress, and preparing societies for rapid global change.

As this transformation accelerates, the most successful education systems will be those that balance economic relevance with academic integrity, innovation with inclusivity, and global engagement with local impact.

# FROM CAMPUS TO CAREER

As universities evolve into innovation-driven ecosystems, internships, startups, and entrepreneurial learning are redefining how students transition from academic life to professional success

The role of universities is no longer confined to imparting knowledge—it now extends to shaping careers, fostering innovation, and nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. Across the globe, higher education institutions are transforming into dynamic ecosystems where students are encouraged not only to learn, but to create, experiment, and lead.

At the centre of this shift is a growing recognition that academic success alone is not enough. Employers increasingly value practical experience, adaptability, and entrepreneurial thinking—qualities that are best developed beyond the traditional classroom.

Internships have become a critical bridge between campus and career. Universities are strengthening partnerships with industry to provide students with hands-on experience in real-world environments. These opportunities allow students to apply theoretical knowledge, develop professional skills, and gain insights into workplace culture.

In emerging education hubs like Qatar, internships are playing an increasingly strategic role. As the country advances sectors such as energy, finance, technology, and healthcare, universities are aligning internship programmes with national economic priorities. This ensures that students graduate with relevant experience and are better prepared to contribute to the workforce.

Structured internship programmes, often embedded within degree requirements, are helping students build networks, enhance employability, and in many cases, secure full-time positions even before graduation.

Alongside internships, universities are actively fostering a culture of entrepreneurship. Campuses are becoming incubators of ideas, where students are encouraged to develop startups, explore innovative solutions, and take calculated risks.

Innovation hubs, research centres, and entrepreneurship programmes are now integral components of many universities.

In Qatar, institutions within Education City exemplify this trend, offering students access to mentorship, funding opportunities, and collaborative spaces designed to turn ideas into viable ventures.

Student-led startups are emerging across sectors—from technology and sustainability to healthcare and creative industries. These ventures not only contribute to economic diversification but also instil confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills among students.

Beyond launching businesses, universities are increasingly focused on cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset. This involves encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and a willingness to challenge conventional approaches.

Entrepreneurship is being integrated into curricula across disciplines, ensuring that even students in non-business fields develop skills such as innovation, leadership, and strategic thinking. Workshops, hackathons, and startup competitions further reinforce this mindset, providing platforms for students to test ideas and collaborate across disciplines.

This approach aligns closely with national development strategies such as Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasise innovation, private sector growth, and knowledge-based economic development.

## Universities as innovation ecosystems

Modern universities are evolving into full-fledged innovation ecosystems. They are not just centres of learning, but hubs where academia, industry, and government intersect.

Research initiatives are increasingly geared toward solving real-world challenges, often in collaboration with corporate partners. These partnerships enable students and faculty to work on cutting-edge projects, ranging from renewable energy solutions to advanced technologies and healthcare innovations.

Incubators and accelerators within universities provide critical support for early-stage startups, offering mentorship, seed funding, and access to industry networks. This ecosystem approach ensures that ideas developed on campus have a pathway to commercialisation and societal impact.

The future workforce demands more than technical expertise—it requires adaptability, creativity, and a proactive approach to problem-solving. Universities are responding by redesigning programmes to include experiential learning, interdisciplinary studies, and career-focused initiatives.

Career services departments are also evolving, offering personalised guidance, networking opportunities, and skill development workshops. The goal is to equip students not just with degrees, but with the tools and confidence to navigate an increasingly complex and competitive job market.

While the transformation of universities into innovation hubs presents immense opportunities, it also comes with challenges. Ensuring equal access to internships and entrepreneurial resources, maintaining academic rigour, and balancing commercialisation with educational values require careful consideration.

Nevertheless, the momentum is undeniable. As universities continue to adapt, they are playing a pivotal role in shaping economies and societies.

The journey from campus to career is no longer linear. It is a dynamic process that blends learning, experimentation, and real-world engagement. Universities that embrace this evolution are not only enhancing student outcomes but also contributing to broader economic and social development.

In this new paradigm, students are not just graduates—they are innovators, entrepreneurs, and change-makers, ready to shape the future from the moment they leave campus.



## Why continuous, AI-verified competency is the new global standard

By Sameera Ahmed

For much of the last century, earning a university degree was akin to securing a lifetime guarantee against professional uncertainty. It was seen as a four-year inoculation against career risk, a credential that signaled readiness for decades. That promise, however, no longer holds.

Today, technical skills come with an expiration date—sometimes measured in months rather than years. The traditional academic model, largely static in nature, is struggling to keep pace with a world being reshaped at unprecedented speed by artificial intelligence. In this new reality, where you learned something matters far less than what you can do with the technologies driving change.

We are entering an era where continuous, AI-verified competency is becoming a non-negotiable global standard—one that will define employability and relevance throughout an individual's career.

### The Crumbling Certainty: From Classroom to C-Suite

The competency crisis begins early. Nations that recognize the urgency of integrating AI literacy into education systems are taking proactive steps to prevent widening socio-economic divides, as highlighted in the Generation Ready Report 2025.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, the report recommends that all students complete a certification in applied computing before graduating from secondary school. This includes essential future skills such as prompting AI systems, identifying algorithmic bias, and understanding the

broader human implications of artificial intelligence. Meanwhile, countries like Estonia and Singapore are already embedding AI into their education ecosystems, positioning themselves for competitive advantage in a skills-driven global economy.

At the corporate level, the shift is equally pronounced. Continuous learning, once considered optional, is now a prerequisite. Evidence shows that when AI training is mandated within organizations, participation rates approach 100 percent. When left optional, engagement often stagnates between 20 and 30 percent. The message is clear: a degree may help secure a job, but continuous competency is what sustains it.

### Skills as a Liquid Asset

In a landscape where skills evolve rapidly, traditional degrees alone are no longer sufficient as markers of capability. The rise of micro-credentials offers a more agile and responsive alternative.

Micro-credentials—often delivered as digital badges—certify an individual's expertise in specific competencies. They are fast, targeted, portable, and aligned with industry standards. Rather than replacing degrees entirely, they complement them, breaking the monopoly that traditional qualifications once held.

These credentials are particularly effective in specialized domains such as finance and accounting, where up-to-date, demonstrable skills are essential. In essence, skills are becoming "liquid assets"—continuously updated, easily transferable, and immediately verifiable.

### The Rise of the AI Personal Coach

Beyond credentialing, artificial intelligence is transforming how learning itself is delivered. The emerging paradigm is not only faster but also deeply personalized.

Generative AI is enabling the development of advanced Learning and Development (L&D) technologies that create individualized learning pathways at scale. Through adaptive learning algorithms, AI can design unique educational journeys tailored to each learner's strengths, gaps, and pace.

Unlike traditional courses, AI-driven systems function as personal coaches, adjusting content in real time to maximize engagement and retention. This dynamic, responsive approach significantly enhances both the efficiency and effectiveness of learning.

### The Psychological Challenge of AI Dependence

However, this transformation is not without risks. The increasing reliance on AI introduces new psychological challenges that must be addressed.

One concern is the "over-reliance trap," where individuals begin to depend excessively on AI systems to solve problems, potentially weakening their own critical thinking abilities over time. Another is diminished confidence: the immediacy of AI-generated answers may reduce individuals' willingness or ability to make independent decisions, particularly in ambiguous situations.

To counter these risks, AI-verified competency frameworks must incorporate training in digital discernment and critical thinking. Individuals must learn not only how to use AI, but also how to question it, challenge it, and apply human judgment effectively. This aligns with broader global calls, including those from the OECD, for maintaining meaningful human oversight in AI systems.

### The Continuous Competency Mandate

The era of four-year certainty is over. In its place emerges a model defined by continuous iteration, lifelong learning, and AI-verified validation.

For leaders, this means making AI literacy and ongoing upskilling mandatory components of organizational culture. Investment in learning and development must shift away from traditional, static programs toward platforms that offer AI-verified micro-credentials, supported by comprehensive digital portfolios and learner records.

For educational institutions, the role is evolving from knowledge gatekeepers to competency validators. Universities and training providers must embrace AI-audited credentials that demonstrate measurable real-world impact, ensuring that learning outcomes align with industry needs.

At the same time, institutions must leverage generative AI to create personalized learning environments—replicating the role of a personal coach and enabling students to acquire skills more efficiently and effectively.

# CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2026

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Moza Mohammed Al Marri  
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موزه محمد المري  
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تحريم فاطمه  
يارا توفيق العزب  
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