

Authorities crack down on dishonest institutes

Many training establishments in Dubai are masquerading as universities and fraudulently awarding degrees to unsuspecting students, the KHDA says

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• **NOTES**

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) is currently hot on the heels of Training Institutes (TIs) in Dubai that are fraudulently offering degree programmes — actions which are in contravention of its regulations.

Underscoring the seriousness of the matter is the fact that hundreds of students at these institutes are still under the illusion that they are enrolled for legitimate programmes.

Over the past few months, students have complained about their training institutes that have had programmes withdrawn, prompting Campus Notes to investigate.

Punitive measures

The KHDA has revealed that several institutes are offering programmes they are not permitted to run.

However, Chief of the Regulation and Compliance Commission at the KHDA, Mohammad Darwish, said: "[The] KHDA has accorded top priority to dealing with offenders severely. Violations and non-adherence will not be tolerated."

Darwish said the necessary punitive measures, including the closure of errant institutions, were in place to deal with institutes that violate regulations and mislead students.

The KHDA also has an agreement with Dubai Economic Department (DED) in which joint visits to training institutes are conducted.

Complaints

In October last year, student Sabuna Munaf from Al Mihad Educational Institute in Dubai informed Campus Notes that the bachelor's degree she was enrolled in for two years was going to be discontinued and that students were left with no options. Al Mihad Institute had previously advertised it was affiliated with the University Of Calicut in Kerala.

Al Mihad Educational Institute administrator Abdul Gafour said the institute had been giving tuition for Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) programmes for the University of Calicut under its distance education programme.

"Many Indian boys and girls... who complete their higher secondary [education] in the UAE normally prefer to continue their studies with any one of these universities [under their distance education programmes]," he said.

"But after the formation of KHDA, they are not allowing these institutes to conduct university programmes even though it is offered as a correspondence course. They are insisting [that] the institute move to any free zone like Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) or Knowledge Village where the rent and other expenses are not affordable."

At the time of the student's complaint, Darwish confirmed that the KHDA had asked the training institute to withdraw one of its programmes that was not on the list of permitted activities. He said the institute was now fully compliant.

However, some students have been transferred to the Sharjah-based Al Hilal Education Institute, which advertises that it is approved to "conduct various Indian university programmes [for universities] such as [the] University of Calicut, Annamalai University [and] Banasthali Vidyapith".

As the training institute is in Sharjah, it is outside the remit of the KHDA.

Former students from the Campus Educational Institute in Karama have also complained of irregularities with their training institute.

"We passed our BBA from Madras University in the year 2007 through Campus Educational Institute but our problem is that after two years of passing we haven't received our degree certificates," two students said.

"When we personally enquired from the university, we found out that the manager Mr Nandan had not paid enough cash in spite of taking all our tuition fees and there was no record of one of our exam papers."

Campus Educational Institute spokesman Nandan Balakrishnan denied allegations that he had not paid the fees to Madras University. Of the entire 2007 batch of students from Madras University, only two to three students had complained, he said.

"All the students who have appeared for the undergraduate programmes in the above year have received the mark lists from the university, [with the exception of] one or two."

Balakrishnan said it takes one year for Madras University to send degree certificates directly to students.

"...about the KHDA approval, we have not received any intimation from them so far. During the last inspection of the KHDA, we have been asked to include all the activities in our professional licence and give an undertaking that we will not run any courses which are not in the licence."

However, Darwish said: "As is evident... this training institute is offering courses or activities they are not supposed to offer."

The KHDA has observed that training institutes that are asked to shut down programmes in Dubai simply move to other emirates to continue their illegal activities.

Darwish said the KHDA is engaging relevant government authorities across the nation. He said the aim of this cooperation is to stop institutes, whose Educational Services Permits have been withdrawn, from opening similar institutes in other emirates.

Value of degrees

Some students who got degrees from errant training institutes are wondering if their degrees are worthless.

"What the degrees are worth is for the students, the employers and the market forces to decide," said Darwish. He said institutes have the liberty to operate from wherever they wish but if based in Dubai, then guidelines must be followed.

How to avoid being duped

- Be vigilant. When choosing courses at training institutes, colleges and universities, students should be aware of what they are getting into. When training institutes offer college or university-level programmes, students must understand that they are not authorised to do so and are not universities.
- Students should ask to see an institution's KHDA Educational Services Permit where all permitted activities are listed. Students should only register for courses listed in these official documents. Do not blindly register for all courses advertised and offered.
- Besides their permit, the key difference between Higher Education Institutes and Training Institutes lies in the courses they offer. Training Institutes offer short-term courses that lead to professional development, skills enhancement and upgrading of knowledge at the work place. These courses have no credit bearing and do not lead to a higher education degree. If in doubt e-mail the KHDA at rcc@khda.gov.ae

Know your rights

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) states that if a Training Institute (TI) has been asked to withdraw the programme you are enrolled in, the onus of finding students an alternative lies with the institute itself. The institutes are also expected

to refund the fees of students. A TI is not allowed to offer university level programmes, neither is it allowed to collaborate nor affiliate with universities to offer any degree programmes. Violaters must be reported to the KHDA.

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