

# Companies jump to hire qualified Emiratis

But nationals still favour government jobs

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Abu Dhabi : Companies jockeyed for position at Abu Dhabi's annual job fair, Tawdheef, for one final day yesterday to attract qualified UAE nationals, a rare find, according participants and a survey released by the government a day earlier.

Results of a survey by the emirate's Department of Economic Development (DED) showed less than 10,000 of the UAE's 5-million-strong private-sector workforce are UAE nationals. Despite accomplishing 30 per cent economic growth in 2008, DED said the inability of the educational system to keep up with market demands has hindered the ability of nationals to land jobs.

Of those that qualify, the majority choose government and semi-government companies, according to the survey, which tend to offer higher salaries than the private sector.

At Tawdheef, companies offered everything from flash-drives to lavish gift bags to keep the interest of prospective employees, both nationals and foreign residents. Some even offered on-the-spot interviews and hiring to keep the good ones from getting away.

"Our challenge is to raise the number of nationals to keep up with expats, especially since the hospitality industry is relatively new to locals," said Saeed Al Shamsi, Emaratisation manager at Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre. He said nationals now make up about 30 per cent of the company's staff, all serving in administrative positions.

## Being competitive

Jamal Lootah, head of national recruitment at du, said his company is trying to keep from entering into bidding wars with others to land nationals.

"If we go down the compensation road, it will never end," Lootah said. "We offer competitive market salaries and distinguish ourselves through our training programmes."

About 20 per cent of du's 2,000 employees are nationals, a number Lootah said the company aims to raise to 50 per cent in the next five years.