ACTVET
Abu Dhabi Centre for
Technical and Vocational
Education and Training

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COVID 19:
ACTVET's VIRTUAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

VIRTUAL LEARNING

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BROCHURE

> Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in 2020 stated "From crisis emerge men determined to succeed." In the United Arab Emirates, it is the leadership of the education system that have risen to the occasion and transformed the educational system, to manage the health crisis.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai.

"

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed AlNahayan in 2020 stated "Education is top priority for us ... 'Learning from Afar' using the latest technologies, must continue in public schools, private schools, and higher education."

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.

Background

Across the world, life has been affected by the spread of the COVID 19 virus. The disruption to life has had far reaching impact. Navigating through the health crisis takes leadership and it was

This report considers the response to COVID 19, over an eight week period, from the regulator, parent, teacher and student points of view. This report arrives at lessons learnt, guidance for parents, standards for teachers and tips for students to cope with virtual learning.

In response to the health crisis, the Minister of Education immediately introduced 'Learning from Afar',

for all grades for all grades and all other education entities, as the new model adopted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Thus ensuring students' continued learning in this new high risk, health related crisis situations. With a population of 9.89 million (UAEPS, 2020) and a capital city of Abu Dhabi, the Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) school system, consisting of 18 public schools with a registered 7,921 students, two Polytechnics, four Further Education Colleges and four Health Science Colleges with a total register of 5,782 students (PSSN, 2020) went into crisis mode as directed by the regulator of the school system, Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET).

SCHOOLS SYSTEM

6-12
Grades

18
Schools

7,921
Students

COLLEGES AND INSTITUTES

10
Colleges and institutes

5,782
Students

Learning from Afar

On the 4th March 2020, as a preventative measure, the regulator decided to physically close down schools but, continue schooling for the students in their homes and so 'Learning from Afar' was initiated (MoE, 2020). Having already planned for high risk situations, there was in existence a Schools Business Continuity Plan developed for such instances that considered the risk and mitigation of crisis situations. As a result, it was planned that an Operation Room be set up to coordinate the management of the delivery of the 'Learning from Afar' school system, should the need occur.

The **'Learning from Afar'** school system would require many components to ensure all aspects of the 'Learning from Afar' School System could function.

It was planned that the School System would be controlled from an Operation Room that would provide the technical requirements of school administration for remote class teaching. Additional support to the Operations Room would be supplied by an IT Support Centre, a Call Centre, and a Social Media Communication Centre. Principals, Teachers and students would need to adapt to the new 'Learning from Afar' school system. Additionally, staff would need to be tech savvy to deliver class teaching on line and flexible enough to teach the curriculum and prepare teaching materials for online teaching as the need arose.

The main hub of the operation centred around the ability of technology to smoothly support the 'Learning from Afar' schooling. It was planned that support would be available every day to assist school administration with any needs, in communication with the Operation Room. It was planned that the Operation Room would use online screens to communicate with school administration in real time. Administration staff would ensure that class teachers were available and able to use the technology to teach and

more importantly students were able to receive their education. Banks of screens were needed to view the live steaming of the class delivery from the school system to the students. Each school needed to set up classrooms with computers for live streaming. For teaching staff, because they had experience of teaching online and at a distance, very little training was required. Curriculums were already designed for flexible use.

It was planned that an IT Support Centre would be available to assist with any technical issues associated with connectivity between the Operation Room, school, students, teachers and parents. Planning included a direct line for school and pupils to phone for technical support. A Call Centre was planned to provide general information to assist teachers, students and parents to navigate the 'Learning from Afar' schooling.

Additionally, Call Centre staff were to be supplied with Frequently Asked Question sheets to assist in giving a consistent message to callers.

It was planned that social media would be central to the Operational Room strategy to ensure all parties were informed about the 'Learning from Afar' approach. The school system and ACTVET the regulator, already used the most widely used social media sites in the UAE, Twitter and Instagram, to communicate. Therefore, it was decided that Twitter and Instagram would be the method of communication with teachers, students and parents. Similarly, **the government, it was planned would continue to use the state communication entity WAM to monitor progress and communicate using Twitter for full reach into the community.**

It was also planned that live streaming of classroom teaching would be available in real time. Teachers were already familiar with the online teaching and distance teaching materials and the technology to deliver. Therefore, it was anticipated that very little training would be required and there would be minimum disruption. It was anticipated that the curriculum could be delivered online and at a distance because the school system had been developing e-books and using an online learning management system for attendance and delivery of course work and marking over the previous five years. It was anticipated that very little disruption to classes would be because of teachers' ability or materials.

On March 4th by social media, the regulator of the school system, ACTVET, informed at 19:30 on the evening before, that the school system would be delivered virtually online from 07:30 the next morning. School Administration, teacher, students and parents were given 12 hours' notice that the Business Continuity Plan was to be implemented and 'Learning from Afar' would be applied. All plans for the event of a crisis were immediately activated.

School Administrators, teachers, students and parent were informed by email, SMS, Twitter and Instagram, that the 'Learning from Afar' would be applied the next day. The implication was that students were not to attend school and teaching would be streamed from schools to the student's home as of 07:30 the next morning.

ACTVET, the regulator, immediately swung into action. Technicians were contacted that night to come to ACTVET to erect the Operation Room consisting of an IT Support Centre and Call Centre. Staff that had been identified in the Business Continuity Risk Management plan for the IT support and Call Centre were called to set up. IT staff arrived to ACTVET with their own computing equipment that had been issued previously, as standard to all staff. The computing equipment used in schools, was compatible throughout the whole school system allowing ease of setup of the IT Centre. IT staff then offered support to schools requiring assistance with technical issues and connections. Staff consisting of school Student Services staff, operated the Call Centre. Staff,

were issued with headphones and were immediately giving out information with the assistance of pre-scripted Frequently Asked Questions. Support was given to parents and students on the requirements for the 'Learning from Afar' initiative. To establish the Operation Room, computer equipment was set up for communication with the schools, parents and students.

From the evening before, right through the night, a large multi-purpose training room was converted into the main Operation Room. Training furnishings were moved out and banks of computers and TV screens brought in. The Operation Room, consisted of work desks for the controlling staff that included a temporary 'Head Master' to coordinate technology and communications. The Director General of the regulator, ACTVET was Directing operations and the Director of the Schools was in attendance communicating with schools to ensure that live streaming was set up in every classroom, teachers were in attendance and students were online. The Operation Room was able to communicate with School Administrators in a two-way screen. School Administrators could see the Operation Room and the Operation Room could see the School Administration live in real time. Additionally, each individual school was monitored for connectivity to see the teachers teaching classes online.

All communication was followed by the UAE government on the official media outlet WAM, to monitor the effect on the community of the 'Learning from Afar' initiative. The government was especially

concerned because of the importance placed on learning within the UAE. The UAE population is used to receiving communication through Twitter, as it is His Highness, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed AlNahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, preferred way of reaching the population.

On the morning of the 'Learning from Afar' operation the connectivity and reach of the schooling was monitored by the temporary Head Master. By 07:30 the next morning 18 online School Administration connections were live, by 09:00 am 22 were live, by 10:00 am 24 were live and by 11:15 am 25 were live. Within four hours, all School Administrators had established contact with the Operation Room. Student online engagement was measured at 80% by 09:00 am and 90% by 11:15 am including the later starting higher education institutions. Therefore, within four hours 90% of students were online receiving education.

Feedback from teachers indicated that they were fully prepared with their curriculum and teaching materials and only had to adapt to 'teaching to a monitor'. Some teachers sat at their desk and taught with the camera, while some stood at their whiteboard and taught. Student feedback said they thought it was fun and even when the classes finished they continued to communicate with their classmates online. Therefore, social interaction was maintained.

School preparedness for crisis situations

It was the realisation of the Director General that ten points of preparedness for the **'Learning from Afar'** initiative could be gained.

1

A Business Continuity Plan is of top importance for the assessment of risk and the application of mitigation for crisis situations.

2

An Operation Room could be set up and operational within 12 hours. Should further crisis emerge then the ACTVET school system will continue to be able to fully function provided the internet connectivity is available.

3

The technology in schools was sufficient to support the 'Learning from Afar' initiative.

4

Regulatory staff had skills and experience required to step into temporary positions as the need arose.

5

Teaching and support staff were flexible enough to be able to function in a remote location with little disturbance.

6

Teachers were able to use the online learning, live streaming system and technology without any challenges. This applied to both digital natives and digital immigrants.

7

The previous use of online, distance and flipped classroom learning was necessary for staff to perform at short notice.

8

The quality of teaching could be quality assured from the Operation Room, by fewer Inspectors, with consistency of judgement, at less cost. Therefore, providing the 'Learning from Afar' initiative created unexpected monetary saving.

9

Students needed to continue to have social contact and chat time with others built into the timetable to avoid social isolation.

10

Standards or guidelines for online virtual teaching was not available for teachers to follow to indicate what best practice or excellence looked like.

Further, school administration, teaching staff, students and parents adapted well to fulfil the plan for the continuity of the education system. Additionally, the school system will be able to continue for an indefinite period of time until the current health crisis is resolved. Therefore, instead of sending children home to contain a health crisis, the UAE was able to do so, with minimal disruption to the education system.

The health crisis changed dynamics, with parents working from home and children at home being taught virtually online. Challenges arose from: working in the same space, finding a quiet space, having sufficient technology, devices and connectivity for each family member. Additionally, supervising, supporting and teaching their own children challenged some households. Once the 'Learning from Afar' initiative began operation, virtual teaching was running smoothly, parents were ensconced in working from home and parents were teaching their children.

Recognising the challenges for families, the government of the United Arab Emirates reacted quickly, and by the end of the third week, announced that all working women, with children under the age of 16, senior staff over 60 years old, pregnant women staff, staff with determined (disabled persons) dependents, and staff with chronic disease were allowed to work from home (HRA, 2020). Thus, families were less pressured, and mothers could look after the household and parent-teach their children.

On hearing of the challenges and the concerns of the parents, H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed AlNahyan the Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, immediately directed the Ministry of Education to provide: every student, in every school throughout the UAE, whether public or private, or a UAE national or a non UAE national, an iPad, free of cost.

As the lockdown progressed, it became apparent that the home situation would last longer than a few weeks. Parents started to ask questions of the school system about: how long the virtual online teaching last, what would the arrangements be for Ramadan, how would student year work be assessed for progress and how could share devices be used more efficiently in the home.

For Parents

The Director General of the regulator, Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET), decided to hold a Virtual Parent Meeting of parents of Grade 6, 7 and 8. On learning of the extent of the parents' questions, two schools in Al Ain, 170 kilometres and one in Baynounah, 221 kilometres from the regulator in Abu Dhabi, that offer Grade 6 to 8 schooling were invited. The Director of Schools informed parents there would be a scheduled online Virtual Parent Meeting to clarify the lockdown situation.
In addition to the Director General, Managing Directors, the Director of Schools, Director of Student Services, Director of Support Services and Head of IT, Principals and Deputy Principals of all schools were in attendance to answer the parent's questions.

Virtual Parent Meeting

One hundred an eighty-four parents (184) attended the one hour scheduled virtual meeting for Grade 7, 8 and 9. At the end of the hour, the meeting closed but parents could remain if they had questions. One hundred and thirty-six (136) parents remained. Such was the success of the Grade 6, 7 and 8 meeting that a Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 meeting was held three days later to service thirteen schools. Seven hundred and forty-four (744) parents, attended the virtual meeting, an unexpected number. In total nine hundred and twenty-eight (928) parents, representing all seven emirates, and all school grades attended the Virtual Parents Meetings. To capture the main points of the meetings, meetings were recorded. Parents were informed of the recording and asked that those who did not wish to appear on camera to switch the camera off and remain in the conversation by voice only. The Virtual Parent Meetings began with the temporary 'Head Master' giving the conditions for attending the meeting. Parents had to switch their microphones off when they were not speaking, they had to use the 'raise your hand' button to indicate they wanted to speak, and had to follow the theme of the discussion led by the Director General, who

The Director General of the regulator, ACTVET, decided to hold a Virtual Parent Meeting
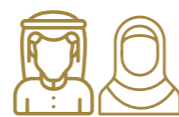
928 PARENTS
attended

CONNECTED
with all over UAE

Launch of the rotating one hour 'A virtual hour with the Principal'
WEEKLY MEETINGS

would indicate when a new subject for discussion was open.

Many parents mentioned they did not get the opportunity to attend such meetings in the past due to work commitments and working in different cities. This was their first time to attend because it was virtual. Some said it was an honour to be able to discuss directly with the highest government officials and would like the practice to continue. The Director General immediately supported the request, announcing the launch of the rotating one hour 'A virtual hour with the Principal' weekly meetings, where parents from selected school are invited to meet their Principal and teachers.

Parents asked many questions covering many areas particularly: class work, examinations and timing for virtual classes. The main questions and answers were:

Q   How long the lockdown would continue during the health crisis?

A   The government would make the decision.

Q   What can be done for families with poor internet connections and many family members accessing devices at the same time for work and study?

A   Parents were advised to maintain the maximum speed and capacity of their internet and reduce the number of additional persons on the internet during school and work hours. Those in outlying areas were advised that they may have to take separate data packages for individual devices.

Q   How would projects, assessment and examinations be conducted?

A   Projects are to be submitted online using written work, photographic and video evidence. Assessment and examination to be conducted on the learning management system. Failing students to have online re-sit examinations. Practice examinations to be circulated to assist student's examination preparation. All grading would be as normal. Second term certificate would be issued within two days.

Q   What kind of support is available for my child?

A   Teachers are recording classes and the videos are available online. Additional support is available by prior arrangement between the teacher and the child but should not be used as a route for private tuition.

Q   What will the timing be during Ramadan?

A   Normal virtual schooling would continue until Ramadan. Then, during the holy month of Ramadan, when fasting, 40 minute periods will be in operation from 10:00 am to 13:55 pm.

Q   How do teachers react when experiencing interruptions from undisciplined students?

A   Virtual teaching poses many issue surrounding control. Teachers are taking attendance at the start, middle and end of each lesson to ensure the students are present and participating in class. Teachers have been issued with Virtual Teaching Standards for guidance on best practice.

Q   Working on iPads has reduced the skill of students writing in English and Arabic.

A   Developing and maintaining handwriting skills will be a focus.

**Q   What was the plan for the next academic year?**

A   The plan was circulated to all parents after the meeting.

Q   How were the different school systems to be judged for university entry?

A   The universities and colleges were using a system which equated student results from different school systems for university acceptance selection.

A virtual hour
with the Principal
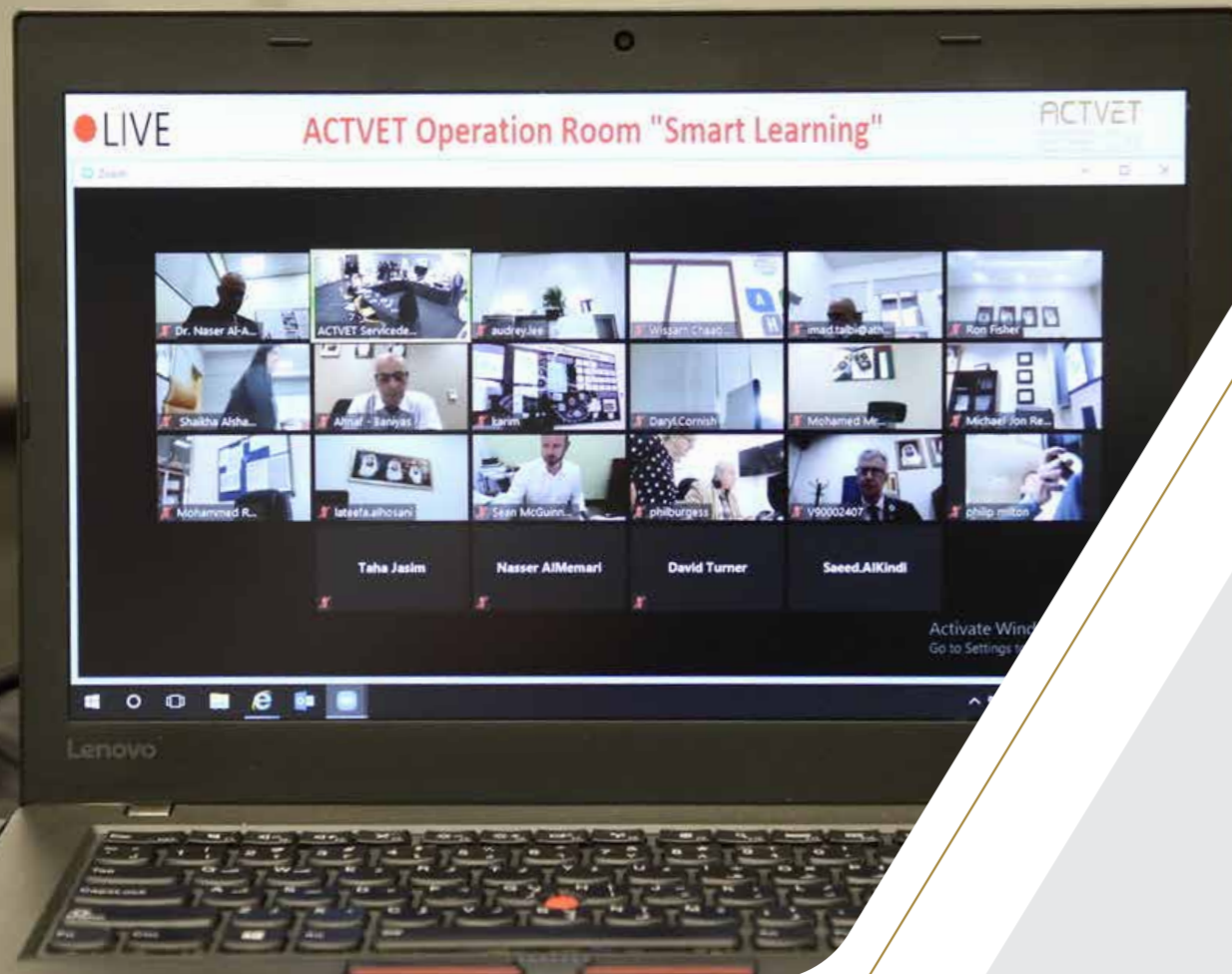
covering all school grades in the school system, were conducted within one week. Questions arising from the Virtual Parents Meeting were discussed with parents, allowing regional issues to be considered and clarified. As a result of the disruptive thinking, many innovative changes were made to the school system to accommodate the parents' concerns, and were:

‣ Parents› can request one to one online parent / teacher meetings based on parent›s request.

‣ Monthly parents meeting scheduled.

‣ Term 3 discussion with students and parents conducted.

‣ Campus help desks and technical support teams available daily for students.

‣ PE teachers sending health and safety videos for personal fitness.

Having applied the changes, ongoing discussion and evaluation with parents continued. It was the Director General that decided to follow up with parents and send a Virtual Learning Survey for completion. Open questions allowed parents to feedback anonymously and in confidence to the Director General and Director of Schools.

As a follow up on the Director General's promise to conduct weekly meetings with the Principal, teachers and parents, twenty six (26) 'A virtual hour with the Principal', school meetings, representing every school, in every emirate,
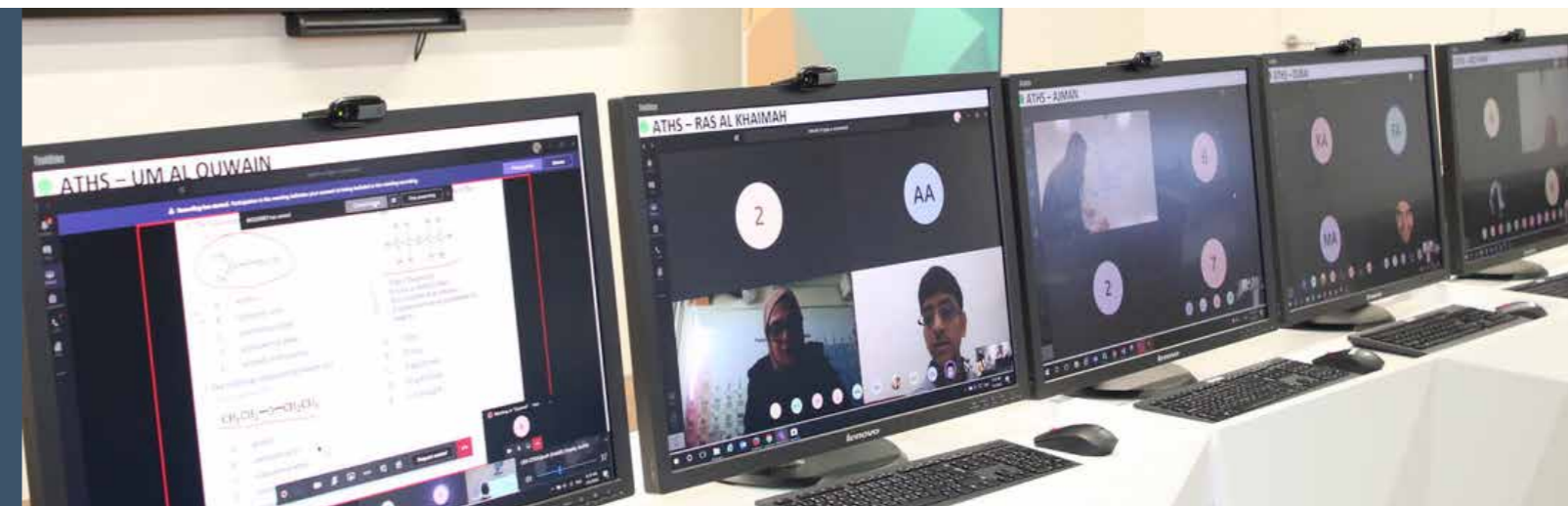
Virtual Learning Survey - Parents

748 PARENTS
responded the Survey

On the same day of the Virtual Parents Meetings, the Director General issued the online Virtual Learning Survey to find out the views of the parents. Parents were sent a very short questionnaire and were given a selection of nineteen (19) options to choose, one or all, to reflect their views. A total of seven hundred and forty eight (748) parents responded giving one thousand three hundred and twenty two (1322) different responses to the options. The top five recorded challenges were as follows:

▶ Workload - 106

▶ Connection to internet - 102

▶ Complete work virtually - 99

▶ Completing virtual assessment - 91

▶ Following the learning process - 79

Parents' had four main areas of concerns: workload, connectivity, assessment and following the learning process, points that senior school administers noted. Parents' were also asked their view in an open question about the virtual learning experience and a sample of parents' responses are as follows:

Abu Dhabi parent of children in Grade 12, 9, 7 and 6

▶ Our home is not designed for virtual learning.

▶ My children attend class from their bedroom.

▶ We need the plan to cover the gap in learning for next school year.

Abu Dhabi parent of child in Grade 12

▶ One source of work is needed because it is confusing for the student, pictures by email, home work in another platform, some teachers use the Teams and some of them in Learning Management System (LMS).

Al Ain parent of 5 children in 5 grades

▶ I need 5 rooms and 5 devices just for the children, it is challenging.

Abu Dhabi parent of child in Grade 9

▶ Child not engaged in learning. Reduce the amount of homework for the children.

Ajman parent of child in Grade 9

▶ The teacher cannot hear my child online and marks him absent.

Sharjah parent of child in Grade 10

▶ Coordination of school work and following up with the teacher is difficult.

Abu Dhabi parent child in in Grade 11

▶ Class periods are too long and are a too early start during Ramadan.

Dubai parent of child in Grade 11

▶ Student assessment is unfair.

### Umm Al Quwain parent of child in Grade 11

▶ Due to the school disruption, give all students a pass for this year.

Fujairah parent of child in Grade 12

▶ The internet in the house is poor and the teachers screen keeps freezing.

The main issues emerging from parents from the open questions in the Virtual Learning Survey are as follows:

▶ Too many assignments, project and homework projects.

▶ Not enough devices and rooms for all the children to have a quiet environment.

▶ Internet unstable, screens freezing both in the home and the teacher's device.

▶ School timing, classes too long and too early start during Ramadan.

▶ Motivation and participation of children.

▶ Lack of information from the school.

▶ Request one source for all the school work.
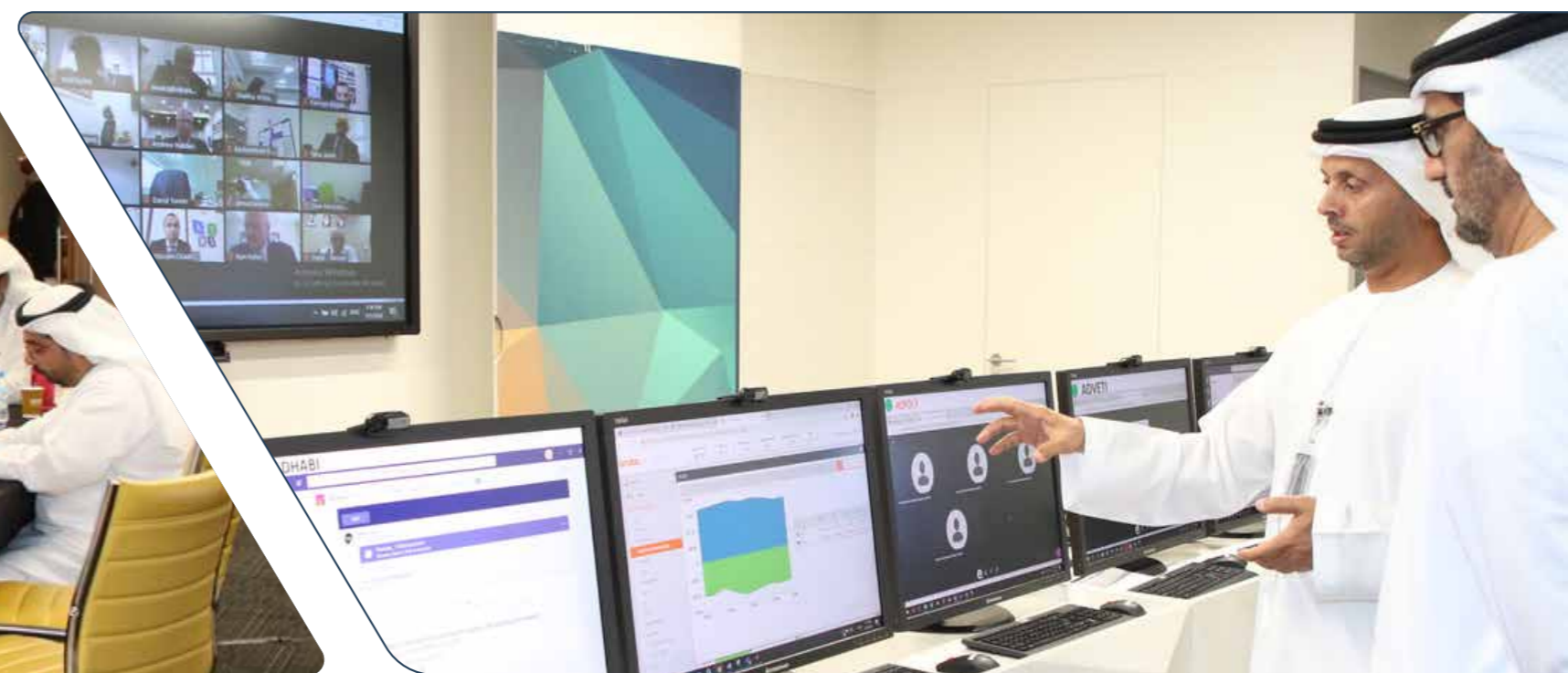
Ten tips for parents

The results from the Virtual Learning Survey for parents were valuable and informative to the school system. The results allowed the Director of Schools, Principals and teachers to consider the parents' concerns, by school location and grade, for discussion at the next 'A Virtual hour with the Principal' weekly meeting. This cycle of evaluation allowed the school system to address and implement innovative solutions quickly, to improve the quality of the learning experience. As a result of the feedback, a ten point guide for the parent was developed and is as follows:

1
Arrange for the correct internet package for the requirements for the size of the family›s devise usage.

2
Provide children with quiet areas throughout the house.

3
Provide desk or solid working space for each child.

4
Provide the resources that your children need for the learning process.

5
Ensure your children are attending and participating in virtual classes.

6
Support your children throughout the learning process.

7
Follow the learning challenges faced by your children and contact the help desks for assistance.

8
Ensure your children move around during their ten minute breaks to prevent eye and back strain.

9
Allow your child to virtually socialise (safely), with school friends to prevent social isolation.

10
Prominently display a checklist of tasks for each child and check off when completed.

For Teachers

660 TEACHERS
completed a Virtual Learning Survey.
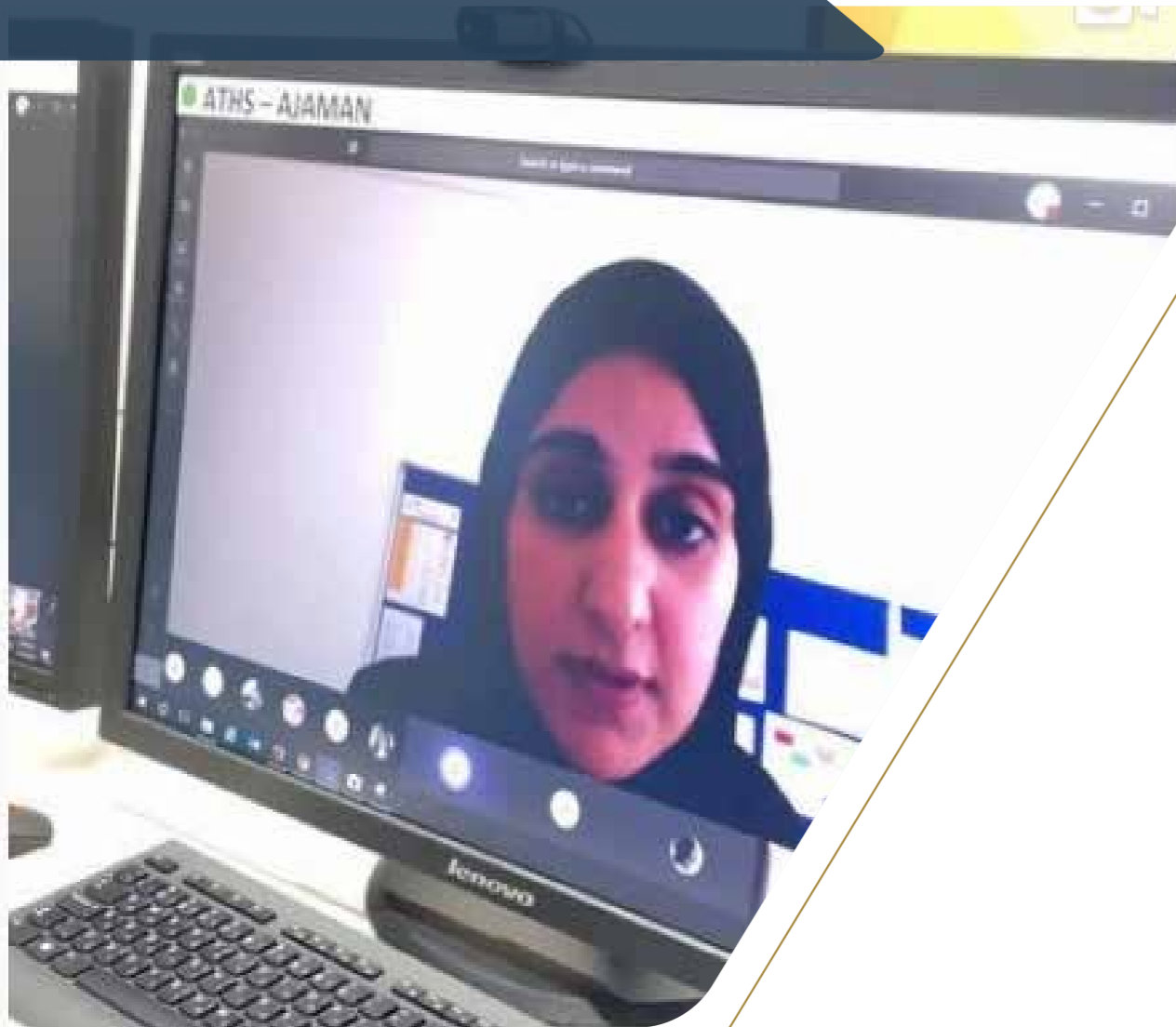
Virtual Learning Survey - Teacher

Next, the Director General considered that teachers needed a voice and asked that the teachers complete a Virtual Learning Survey. Six hundred and sixty (660) teachers completed the survey giving a total of one thousand four hundred and twenty five (1425) responses to the

nineteen option. The top five concerns of the teachers were:

- Virtual assessment conditions - 139
- Isolation from social contact - 128
- Completing virtual assessment – 126
- Virtual assessment - 119
- Workload – 117.

Teachers were also invited to voice their main challenges and a sample of results are as follows:

Teacher Grade 6 and 7

Al Ain - Due to IT Administrator restrictions, I am limited with the software that I can install on my laptop which is limiting functionality.

Teacher Grade 8

Al Ain - Lack of response from students when tasks are set.

Teacher Grade 9

Abu Dhabi - I think virtual assessment is an area that needs development.

Sharjah - We need virtual testing and examination applications as soon as possible.

Teacher Grade 10

Umm Al Quwain - Students are entering virtual classrooms late, with too much background noise.

Fujairah – Trustworthiness is a challenge in the exam process.

Teacher Grade 11

Ras Al Khaimah - Virtual learning

restricts the possibilities of a teacher engaging unmotivated students in discussions and interactions in comparison to face to face classroom learning.

Teacher Grade 12

Sharjah - Working remotely added much more pressure on me and I feel like I'm working 24/7.

Ajman - I can't find time for my family!

Abu Dhabi - Long exposure time to screen has started affecting my vision and is causing me constant headaches.

Three main areas emerged for the teacher were assessments, workload and social isolation. The result gave the Director General and Director of Schools a better understanding of the teachers' challenges and the following solutions were introduced to assist teachers:

- No more than two sets of homework or quizzes for students per day.
- Term 3 SWQ 1, replaced with short central assessment and ongoing school based quizzes.
- Campus help desks and technical support teams available daily for students.

- Guidelines circulated for teachers and students for use of MS Teams.

- PE teachers sending health and safety videos for personal fitness.

- Teachers are permitted to use the virtual communication applications outside of school hours to maintain social contact to reduce social isolation.

In this new continuous online virtual environment, the Director General of ACTVET, the regulator, realised the importance of preparing a virtual learning standard for teachers to follow. Soon, a team of teachers were contacted to discuss, brainstorm and report on the important issues associated with virtual teaching. From the teacher's feedback, virtual standards emerged that were important for the continuation of excellence in teaching. The draft Virtual Teaching Standard was developed and circulated to teachers in the UAE and internationally for feedback and evaluation. The Virtual Teacher Standard was subsequently approved. All teachers in the ACTVET school system received a copy of the Virtual Teacher Standard and it became the basis for the inspection criteria subsequently developed. As a result, an eight point indicator of Virtual Teaching Standard was established and is as follows:

Virtual Teaching Standard

Indicator 1

APPLICATIONS AND CONNECTIONS

1.1   Teacher downloads and use multiple computer applications and packages.

1.2   Teacher connects by voice and web cam (preferred) for maximizing virtual communication with learners.

1.3   Teacher accesses and uses whiteboard for virtual teaching (preferred).

1.4   Teacher accesses and uses a learning management system or similar.

1.5   Learners and teachers access to technical support is available.

Indicator 2

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

2.1   Teacher dresses professionally at all times.

2.2   Teacher is visible or audible on camera for the duration of the virtual class.

2.3   Teacher engages and interact with learners professionally.

2.4   Teacher maintains confidentiality of learner personal details, records of learner achievement and progress.

2.5   Maintain self, health, fitness and wellbeing.

Indicator 3

CLASS WORK PREPARATION (WHERE TEACHERS HAVE RESPONSIBILITY)

3.1 Teacher prepares for lessons with the appropriate materials available.

3.2 Teacher sends all materials to learners that are required for a class before the commencement of the class.

3.3 Teacher records the class work and stores on the learning management system for students who missed class.

3.4 Teacher develops and deliver classwork that reflects sequencing and scaffolding of curriculum requirements.

3.5 Teacher paces class work to enable learner success and maximize learning.

3.6 Teacher give students off line work as a breaks from use of computer.

Indicator 4

TEACHER PEDAGOGY

4.1 Teacher plans holistic well-structured learning that is learner centred, paced and levelled to maximise learner achievement.

4.2 Teacher pedagogy demonstrates quality, educational best practice.

4.3 Teacher skills and knowledge responds to learner responses and needs.

4.4 Teacher supports virtual learning and has high expectation for learner achievement.

4.5 Teacher promotes the concepts of citizenship, culture and its values, social justice, equality and inclusion.

4.6 Teacher and peers evaluate learning outcome achievement, teaching approaches and standardization of curriculum delivery and assessment at regular intervals.

Indicator 5

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

5.1 Teacher is adept at monitoring learners working in virtual classrooms and virtual sub groups (Channels) groups.

5.2 Teacher structures the virtual learning environment to promote and maximise a safe learning environment.

5.3 Teacher differentiates learning with sensitivity to ensure maximization of learner achievement.

5.4 Teacher maximises learning by ensuring learner behaviour and resources are managed effectively.

5.5 Teacher allows virtual socialization between classmates, as appropriate, where students are in remote learning environments.

Indicator 6

VIRTUAL ASSESSMENT

6.1 Teacher instructs learners about the virtual assessment, prior to assessment.

6.2 Teacher prepares virtual assessment that reflect the classwork and curriculum requirements.

6.3 Teacher prepares fair, valid, reliable and equitable assessment.

6.4 Teacher provides learners with feedback and guidance for performance improvement.

6.5 Teacher utilises assessed performance outcomes for monitoring, tracking and reporting learner success.

Indicator 7

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Teacher maintains currency of apps to maximize the learner experience.

7.2 Teacher undertakes regular reflection, research and professional development activities for lifelong learning.

7.3 Teacher engages with educators in the learning community to maximize virtual learning knowledge and skill.

7.4 Teachers take responsibility for their own professional learning and maintain currency of knowledge and virtual practice in and for the teaching domain.

Indicator 8

VIRTUAL ONLINE SECURITY

8.1 Teacher and student uses passwords for virtual online safety and privacy.

8.2 Teachers assess immediate and cumulative risks with learners in a virtual environment.

8.3 Teachers is mindful of the health and safety of themselves and learners.

8.4 Teacher reports any perceived or actual risk to educational Authorities (or predetermined agency).

For Students

Virtual Learning Survey - Students

Regarding the students' learning experience, the Director General wanted to improve the learning experience for the student and decided to consulted them about their challenges. It was decided that students complete the Virtual Learning Survey. An impressive two thousand, nine hundred (2900) students participated in the Virtual Learning Survey selecting four thousand nine hundred and ninety four (4194) options from the nineteen (19) options offered, with the top five concerns being:

- Completing virtual assessment - 366

- Completing work virtually - 323

- Concentrating the learning process - 301

- Connection to internet - 300

- Engaging in learning process - 247

The main concerns for the students was related to assessment, the learning process and internet connections which the school system noted. Additionally, students were asked in an open question to voice their concerns and a sample of the responses were as follows:

Student Grade 6 - Al Ain

- Problem entering calls, hearing information is hard because students will not switch their microphone off.

Student Grade 7 - Baynounah

- Class time is too long, please shorten.

Student Grade 8

- Al Ain - School starts too early.

Students Grade 9

- Umm Al Quwain - I cannot find motivation to study online.
- Abu Dhabi – Very confusing and stressful and I am struggling.

Students Grade 10 - Ajman

- Ajman - Teacher not explaining well.
- Ras Al Khaimah - Too much workload and pressure and my back and eyes hurt.
- Abu Dhabi – I have a lack of focus and concentration.

Students Grade 11

- Sharjah – I have a lack of motivation;

it takes time to adapt to online learning.

- Abu Dhabi - Lots of work, breaks are very short, just 10 minutes.
- Abi Dhabi - Teachers are not using their camera so it is hard to focus and follow class.

Students Grade 12

- Ras Al Khaimah - Teacher does not switch on the cameras so difficult to follow the learning process.
- Al Ain - Too much work.
- Abu Dhabi – Teacher does not respond to emails.
- Sharjah - Missing class because I am sleeping.
- Dubai - Depressed because I cannot see my friends, I used to challenge them in class and that motivated me.

As a result of the survey, the Director General and Director of Schools were in a better position to understand the students' challenges in the virtual learning environment. Because information was returned by region and grade, it was possible for school administration to identify where weaknesses were occurring to take corrective action. The following solutions were introduced to assist students:

- No more than two sets of homework or quizzes for students per day.
- Principal meets students daily and

weekly per grade level to discuss all of student's issues.

- Term 3 discussion with students and parents.
- Term 3 SWQ 1, replaced with short central assessment and ongoing school based quizzes.
- Principals spreading positive messages to motivate students and engage in on online learning.
- Campuses starting extracurricular clubs with their students (science clubs, chess, coding, cooking).
- Campus help desks and technical support teams available daily for students.
- Guidelines circulated for teachers and students for use of MS Teams.
- PE teachers sending health and safety videos for personal fitness.

Ten tips for students

To assist students to meet virtual learning requirements, ten points of guidance emerged and are as follows:

1 Take responsibility for own learning.

2 Take responsibility for following and participating in virtual learning environment.

3 Maintain discipline of use of camera and microphone and reduce background noise.

4 Complete all assignments and projects on time.

5 Pace learning and completion of workloads.

6 Use the campus help desks and technical support teams as soon as challenges arise.

7 Ask the teacher (raise hand) for assistance where clarification is needed.

8 Maintain self, health, fitness and wellbeing.

9 Use apps (safely) to maintain social contact with school friends.

10 Participate in extracurricular activities that are of interest.

Conclusion

The ACTVET school system continues to function virtually and fully with online learning being carried out remotely in virtual environments. However, the daily approach to education has changed, as a result of the evolving health crisis. Changes have affected how teachers teach and how students learn. The ACTVET school system is showing resilience in its approach to maintaining the quality of teaching by meeting parents and giving parents, teachers and students a platform to record their concerns.

Over the eight week period from start to writing this paper, the following efforts addressed concerns in the school system, as follows:

▸ Virtual Parents Meeting - A total of nine hundred and twenty-eight (928) parents, representing all seven emirates, and all school grades attended the meeting.

▸ Virtual Parents Meeting - Grade 7, 8 and 9 - One hundred an eighty-four parents (184) attended.

▸ Virtual Parents Meeting, Grade 9, 10, 11, and 12 - seven hundred and forty-four (744) parents attended.

▸ Twenty six (26) 'A Virtual hour with the Principal' meetings were conducted.

▸ Virtual Learning Survey - A total of four thousand three hundred and eight (4308) parents, teacher and students completed the survey, returning six thousand nine hundred and forty one (6941) responses to options.

▸ Virtual Learning Survey - Parents - Seven hundred and forty eight (748) parents responded to the survey returning one thousand three hundred and twenty two (1322) responses to options.

▸ Virtual Learning Survey - Teachers - Six hundred and sixty (660) teachers completed the survey returning one thousand four hundred and twenty five (1425) responses to options.

▸ Virtual learning Survey - Students - Two thousand, nine hundred (2900) students completed the survey returning four thousand nine hundred and ninety four (4194) responses to options.

Additionally, practical guides and standards were developed as follows:

▸ Ten points of preparedness for crisis in a school system.

▸ Ten point guide to assisting parents in a virtual learning environment.

▸ Eight point Virtual Teaching Standards.

▸ Ten point learning guide for students.

Throughout the health crisis, ACTVET's has been proactive and innovative in the change applications. Although the health crisis journey is not yet complete, the learning as a result, has been immense and will continue which will change forever the teaching and learning environment in the UAE. Good leadership and direction in this health crisis in the United Arab Emirates has transformed and improved learning using agile thinking to disrupt and innovative practice. As stated at the beginning of this report, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in 2020 said "From crisis emerge men determined to succeed." The Director General of ACTVET and the leadership of the school system, parent, teachers and students, are succeeding in transforming the virtual learning experience.

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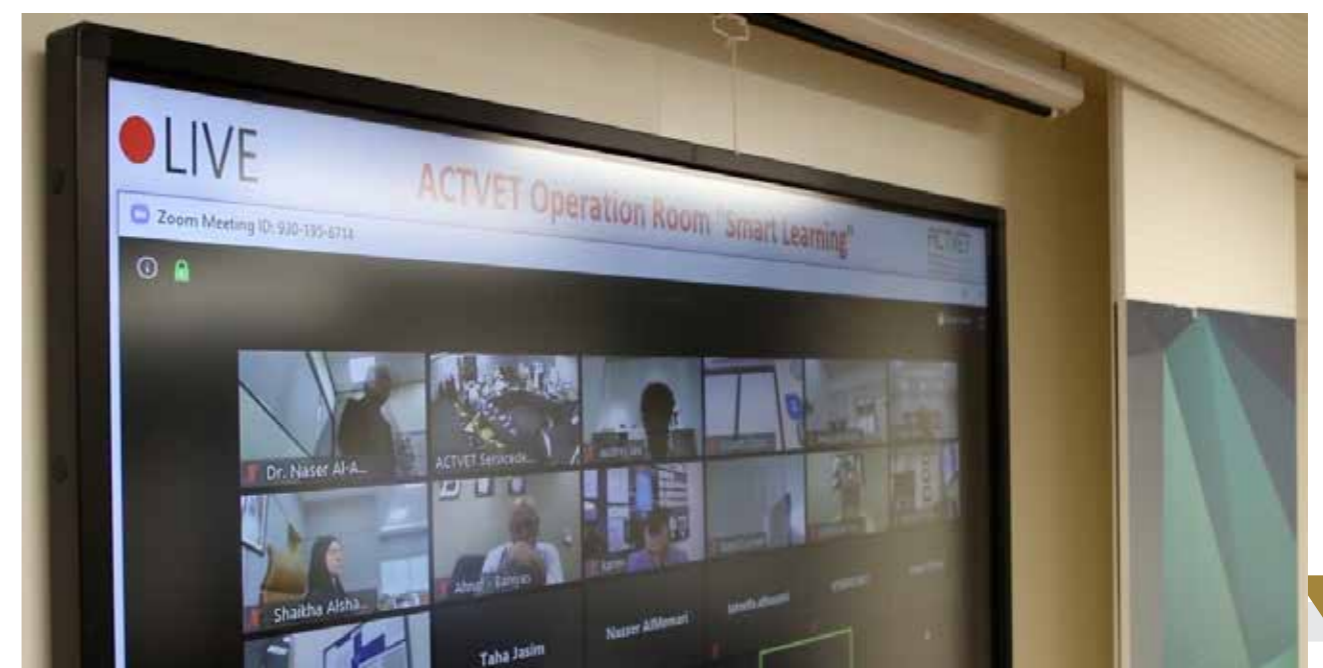
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