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UAE's Higher Colleges of Technology Becomes World's First HEI to Achieve QS ESG 5-Star Rating

The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) has become the first Higher Education Institution in the world to achieve a 5-Star rating in the Quacquarelli Symonds' (QS) Environment, Sustainability and Governance (ESG) category.

The UAE federal HEI's performance was rated according to its sustainability in environmental operations, education and research related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. HCT's commitment to environmental sustainability is demonstrated by its sustainable policies, Carbon Neutral 2030 plan and climate Action Plan, the education and outreach programs, and the reduction in energy and resource consumption.



HCT's submission for the Environment, Sustainability and Governance category was evaluated on such factors as its environmental sustainability policies, its climate action plan, energy & resources consumption, HCT's research endeavors and its environmentally sustainable student organizations and education initiatives, such as public education and outreach.

In addition to its 5-Star rating in the Environmental Impact category, HCT has also been awarded a 5-Star rating in the Online Learning category. HCT's Online Learning capabilities achieved high scores for its student-faculty engagement and student interaction; its exemplary student services and technology; access to online library databases; online career centers and career advisors and online outsourcing.

For the Online Learning category, the QS judging panel considered factors such as HCT's commitment to online learning, its student interactions and student-focused e-Services and technologies and its track record in the online teaching and learning field.

Professor Abdullatif AlShamsi, HCT President & CEO, hailed the groundbreaking ESG 5-Star Rating, and the Online Learning rating, as confirming HCT's position as a global education leader, while reinforcing its commitment to the UAE national agendas.

"The QS 5-Star ratings in both categories will firmly establish HCT as a local, regional and global education leader with sustainable practices embedded in its core activities. They will also significantly boost HCT reputation among international institutions seeking potential academic collaborations," Prof. AlShamsi said.

"HCT, with a student body of about 23,000 students and 2,000 employees, is uniquely positioned to promote and reinforce sustainability related national agendas, such as the UAE Vision 2021 and the National Climate Change Plan 2017-2050. It is our duty to ensure HCT's operations are aligned with these initiatives, by developing and implementing related innovative courses and initiatives," he added.

Prof. AlShamsi noted that by implementing a detailed sustainability plan, HCT is ensuring its impact and longevity, in terms of its educational and operational models. "Our role is not just to implement sustainability practices within HCT, but also to create an awareness of sustainability practices among students, faculty and staff. This is achieved through fully embracing sustainability practices and connecting with the HCT community by teaching, educating and informing them as to sustainability values," he said.

Dr. Ashwin Fernandes, QS Regional Director of Middle East, Africa & South Asia, congratulated HCT on the Awards, which he saw as "the trailer to the full picture" of HCT's journey.



“These awards will bring HCT into the global picture, where you will be recognized for your work in a much broader area. It is also great to translate this for your students, as they should be proud of this and know you have been working for this (award) for them,” Dr. Ashwin said.

He added the QS 5 Star rating will boost HCT’s international standing and attract people from around the world, seeking to work and collaborate with HCT. “This achievement will result in HCT producing graduates who can go anywhere in the world and be recognized that they are from a world renowned institution,” he said.

Prof. AlShamsi cited an array of sustainability-oriented initiatives implemented by HCT, including:

Implementation of HCT policies, such as the Green Building Policy, Sustainable Purchasing Policy & Zero Waste Policy

Formulation of the HCT Carbon Neutral Plan – outlining the path to neutralize its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030

Signatory to the pledge in the Global Universities and Colleges’ Climate Commitment (GUCCC)

Professional development workshops and trainings for faculty & staff

Embedding sustainability into the HCT curriculum through existing programs and courses, such as sustainable and social design, renewable energy systems, introduction to sustainability, environmental engineering

He added the QS ratings will also enhance HCT’s reputation as an innovative hub for teaching and learning and attract leading faculty and educational managers from across the globe, as an employer of choice.

HCT has gained a well-earned, reputation for its award-winning integration of online learning, as a vital factor in its pedagogical approaches. At the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, HCT was seen as a regional leader in the seamless transition from in-class learning to 100 per cent online learning. Subsequently, HCT developed its hybrid education model, which has resulted in students enjoying a blend of on-campus classes and online, remote learning.

Professor AlShamsi said the next iteration of hybrid and online learning was a new education model – the “hyper-hybrid” campus, which advances the bespoke nature of hybrid learning by promoting personalized, skilled and independent learners. It is a new vision for education to meet the challenges posed by digital transformation, while maintaining a balance between distance learning and on-campus learning to ensure quality education.

“At HCT, we have, and will continue to, advocate for the Campus of Tomorrow – a hyper, hybrid campus that attracts Gen Z and integrates online with onsite; virtual with experiential and provides them, the future generation, with the social entertainment that makes their learning fun and impactful,” he said.

“With the growing use of technology and out of the classroom we recognize the importance of striking the right balance between the use of technology in education and learner-centric nature that has always and will be the foundation of impactful learning,” Prof. AlShamsi added.



QS Stars is a rating system that provides a detailed look at an institution, enabling prospective students to identify which universities are the best in specific fields such as program strength, facilities, graduate employability, social responsibility, inclusiveness, environment, sustainability and governance. The rating system offers institutions the opportunity to be assessed in their ability to deliver teaching online through distance or blended learning degrees.

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