

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Al Ain University



جامعة العين
AL AIN UNIVERSITY

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 10

Support Programs for Underrepresented Groups at Al Ain University (AAU)

Academic Mentoring and Tutoring Programs

Al Ain University has taken steps to **empower students from marginalized groups through mentoring and academic support**. In line with its commitment to gender inclusion, AAU provides a *supportive environment* for female students by offering counseling and **mentorship programs** aimed at empowering them aau.ac.ae. For example, the University's College of Business launched a **Women Leadership Forum (WLF)** in recent years. This forum (branded "*She Leads, We Collaborate*" in 2025) connects AAU students with successful women leaders and includes mentorship opportunities and leadership training. It also led to partnerships such as a 2025 Memorandum of Understanding with the Arab International Women's Forum to advance young women's entrepreneurship and leadership opportunities aiwfonline.com. AAU further encourages female participation in traditionally underrepresented fields (like STEM) through targeted programs and networking events, aligning with its gender equality goals.

SDG 5: Gender Equality at Al Ain University

Al Ain University (AAU) is dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). The university's initiatives include:

Equal Opportunities: AAU ensures equal opportunities for all students and staff, promoting a diverse and inclusive environment. The university actively supports women in academic and administrative roles, encouraging their leadership development.

Women's Empowerment Programs: The university organizes workshops, seminars, and events focused on women's empowerment, leadership, and professional development. These initiatives provide women with the skills and confidence to excel in their careers.

Research on Gender Issues: AAU engages in research that addresses gender-related issues and promotes understanding of women's rights and empowerment. Faculty and students are encouraged to explore topics related to gender equality in their research projects.

Supportive Environment: The university provides support services, including counseling and mentorship programs, to empower female students. This environment fosters personal and academic growth, enabling women to thrive in their educational pursuits.

AIWF and Al Ain University sign MoU at keynote ceremony on Abu Dhabi Campus

Haifa Al Kaylani OBE, 28 October 2025 – It was a great honour to be at the Al Ain University Abu Dhabi campus to participate at the outstanding Women Leadership Forum "*She Leads, We Collaborate*", hosted by the Al Ain University College of Business and the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Centre. This very special occasion marked the signing of an MoU between the Arab International Women's Forum

and Al Ain University, to advance women's opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic inclusion in the UAE and the broader MENA region.

Our MoU partnership with Al Ain University marks a significant step forward in our shared commitment to empowering and advancing young female entrepreneurial talent in the UAE and across the wider MENA region. Together, AIWF and Al Ain University aim to create a dynamic platform that nurtures innovation, leadership, and opportunity for the next generation of women leaders.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Professor Ghaleb Awad El Refae, President of Al Ain University, Professor Amer (Mohammad Jaser) Qasem, Vice President of AAU Abu Dhabi Campus, and Dr Iffat Sabir, Deputy Dean of the College of Business, for facilitating this valued partnership between AIWF and Al Ain University. I also share my heartfelt congratulations to Al Ain University on its remarkable recent achievement of being ranked among the top 500 global institutions in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026.

In my keynote before the MoU signing, I reflected on the tremendous progress women have made across the Arab world, in education, business, and leadership, and the continuing journey towards full economic empowerment. Today, women in the MENA region are driving innovation and entrepreneurship, leading family businesses, founding tech startups, and advancing sustainability across every sector. Here in the UAE, the progress has been nothing short of remarkable. Emirati women are role models globally, representing 66% of the public sector workforce, 30% in leadership roles, and 50% of the Federal National Council, a true reflection of the UAE's vision for gender equality and inclusion.

At AIWF, our mission for nearly 25 years has been to empower women and young leaders through education, entrepreneurship and economic inclusion and to build bridges of partnership and understanding between the Arab world and the global community. We have worked with governments, the private sector, civil society actors and importantly with universities and young people themselves to promote progress and create valuable new links and opportunities for young women leaders.

At this very special MoU signing and keynote event, it was a pleasure to meet Her Excellency Dr Amal Abdullah Al Haddabi, Chairperson of the UAE-Jordanian Businesswomen Council, and the distinguished faculty, students, and guests of Al Ain University. As we head into our 25th anniversary in 2026, the Board and Partners of AIWF look forward to deepening our collaboration with one of the UAE's foremost institutes of learning and research, supporting innovation and entrepreneurship, and championing women's leadership as a powerful engine of sustainable growth and social progress.



For **students with disabilities** (referred to in the UAE as “*People of Determination*”), AAU ensures robust academic support and accommodations. The university established a *People of Determination Support Office* which coordinates services and facilities to integrate these students into campus life. This includes priority course registration, tailored orientation events, accessible classrooms (e.g. scheduling classes on ground floors), and academic resources in suitable formats [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com). Sign language interpreters are provided when needed, and special examination arrangements are made for students whose conditions warrant it [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com). These measures help create an inclusive learning environment where students with disabilities can thrive academically. Additionally, AAU’s Learning Support infrastructure — such as the **English Language Center** — assists students (often international or non-native English speakers) in strengthening their language skills as they transition to an English-medium curriculum [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com). This academic tutoring support is *student-centered* and accommodates individual learning differences, ensuring that international students and those from various educational backgrounds do not fall behind.

- **People of Determination Support Office.**

This office works to integrate people of determination with the University community by creating a sustainable learning environment throughout their studies and until their graduation from the University. It contributes to empowering this category of students and arranging their own educational provisions to ensure a fair opportunity to meet all their learning requirements. The office conducts an orientation day in the beginning of each semester to introduce the students to the available services and University facilities. In addition, taking comments or suggestions from their side to improve or provide any services that might help them during their study. There is also a follow up with them each semester in all the courses they register to identify any special needs during the term related to the teaching methods used and to provide any special requirements based on their health condition.

English Language Center

The English Language Center (ELC) at Al Ain University exists to serve the language needs of students who are in a transitional period as they are about to embark on a learning experience where the medium of instruction is English. The staff of the ELC is committed to creating and maintaining an organized and trusting environment where teaching and learning are exciting and students are assisted as they develop their language skills. All aspects of the teaching activities are student-centered and designed to accommodate individual differences and learning styles in order for all to experience success.

Counseling

Orientation for New Students Al Ain University is committed to organizing orientation sessions for new students at the beginning of each semester. These sessions provide guidance and advice on all academic and non-academic aspects. Each college organizes its own event to introduce new students to the college and its academic programs, and to inform them about the availability of academic advisors for every student. The sessions also cover various aspects of academic life, emphasizing the importance of keeping up with their studies and maintaining regular contact with advisors, especially during registration at the beginning of each semester.

Additionally, the Deanship of Student Affairs organizes a special event for new students at the beginning of each semester. Students are introduced to the services and facilities offered by the university in general and the Deanship of Student Affairs in particular. They are guided on where to find information, the university's rules and regulations are explained, and the student handbook is presented, highlighting its importance for accessing all necessary information throughout their university journey. This event is attended by the University President, members of the Deans' Council, Heads of Departments, Academic Program Directors, the Registrar, and all staff of the Deanship of Student Affairs. New students are introduced to all these individuals and informed about how to contact them. A Q&A session is also held to address any questions or concerns.

Additionally, People of Determination Support office organizes an orientation day at the beginning of each semester. This session familiarizes students with disabilities with the university's facilities and the availability of professional counsellors who provide personal support. The office also seeks suggestions from students to improve the services provided to meet their needs throughout their academic journey.

15.2 Academic Advising

- Enlighten students with the academic policies of Al Ain University including the academic system exam, share with them the other academic support available on campus.
- Encouraging students to follow up with the academic advising units in the college to know their academic status and discuss it with the academic advisor.
- Discuss and define individual academic goals and plans with the students.
- The faculty member has the responsibility to
 1. Communicate with the students to meet with them in any possible way (emails, phone calls, Microsoft Teams).
 2. Keep records for each student including transcripts, study plan and any other documents related to advising.
 3. Keep record of any communication with the students such as emails or written documents or meetings through Microsoft Teams.
 4. Review his/ her associated students' transcripts and perform degree and graduation estimations.
 5. Ensure the student study plan is followed by the student.
 6. Advise the student if he/she seeks his help in any matter of his academic journey.

15.3 Personal Counselling

Al Ain University believes that the students are going through many challenges during their university journey. This is why AAU committed to support the students with all kinds of help they might need to succeed in their academic life.

14.3 Facilities Provided for Students of Determination (with special needs):

Al Ain University provides the following services and facilities for students of determination:

1. Offering grants and financial assistance up to 50% of their registered fees; as per regulations implemented by the grant Committee Humanitarian Aid.
2. Giving them the Priority in registration and assisting them in coordinating their schedules according to their conditions.
3. Organize an orientation event for students of determination to introduce them to the University's facilities such as: restaurants, clinic, library, Department of Finance, and the recreational facilities.
4. Providing special parking for them.
5. Guiding them to their lectures.
6. Providing sign language interpreters.
7. Assigning comfortable classrooms for them such as choosing classrooms on the first floor.
8. Providing books and resources appropriate to their needs.
9. Forming special examination committees for those whose condition requires this.
10. Facilitating their participation in various events, exhibitions, and celebrations.

Psychological Counseling and Mental Health Support

Comprehensive counseling services are in place at AAU to support the mental and emotional well-being of students (and by extension staff). The university's *Psychological and Social Counseling* unit is a dedicated office that offers **free, confidential counseling** to students facing personal, social, or academic challenges. AAU recognizes that students encounter many pressures during their university journey, so it ensures the availability of specialized counselors to help them overcome any psychological or social obstacles [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com). These professional counselors provide personal support and guidance, which is especially critical for students from underrepresented or vulnerable groups who may experience additional stress. The counseling services cover personal development and mental health, and AAU even offers **career counseling** through its Career Development Unit to help students plan their futures [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com).

Importantly, AAU extends mental health support to its **staff and faculty** as well. According to the university's SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) reports, the same Psychological and Social Counseling unit provides **free mental health support to employees**, reflecting AAU's inclusive approach to wellness across its community [aau.ac.ae](https://www.aau.ac.ae). In practice, this means faculty and staff can access counseling resources for work-related stress or personal issues, ensuring that support is not limited only to students. By offering counseling services to all its members, AAU fosters a campus culture that prioritizes mental health and well-being for everyone, including those from underrepresented or marginalized groups who might otherwise hesitate to seek help.

15.4 Psychological and Social Counseling

Al Ain University aspires to achieve the highest levels of psychological and social counselling for its students, aiming to overcome any psychological or social obstacles they may face during their university studies. This goal is accomplished by ensuring the availability of specialized counsellors who provide personal assistance to students.

15.5 Career Counseling

AAU is committed to offer students the career counselling needed. One way of obtaining it is through the career development unit.

Peer Support and Student-Led Initiatives

AAU promotes a campus culture of **peer support and inclusion** through various student-focused initiatives. Each semester begins with comprehensive **orientation sessions for new students**, organized by both the individual colleges and the Deanship of Student Affairs [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com). During these orientations, newcomers receive guidance on academic and non-academic matters and are introduced to key contacts and support services on campus. This includes meeting academic advisors and student affairs staff who can assist them. Such events help new students – including international students or those from minority backgrounds – connect with peers and faculty early on, easing their transition into university life. Notably, AAU's People of Determination Support Office also runs a **special orientation day** at the start of each semester for students with disabilities [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com). In these sessions, students with disabilities are familiarized with campus facilities and informed about the availability of personal support counselors. They are encouraged to voice their needs and suggestions, ensuring a two-way dialogue to improve services throughout their studies [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com). This peer-inclusive approach helps students from underrepresented groups feel seen and supported from day one.

Beyond formal orientation, **student-led events and organizations** play a role in peer mentoring and cultural inclusion. AAU's diverse student body (which comprises dozens of nationalities) is celebrated through events like *International Students Cultural Day*, where students share their heritage and foster cross-cultural understanding. Such activities create a welcoming atmosphere for international and minority-nationality students by giving them a platform to engage with the wider student community. Similarly, the Student Council and various clubs often organize workshops, social events, and mentoring meet-ups that encourage students to help each other academically and socially. For example, senior students and club leaders may offer tutoring sessions, study groups, or "buddy" support for first-year and international students (though informal, these practices are encouraged as part of AAU's inclusive campus ethos). Through these peer support networks, students from marginalized genders, different abilities, or foreign countries can find camaraderie and guidance from fellow students who understand their experiences.

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Inclusion Training and Development for Staff and Faculty

Al Ain University also addresses inclusion at the **faculty and staff development** level, acknowledging that an inclusive campus requires awareness and engagement from all members. The university has instituted policies and programs to prevent discrimination and promote equal opportunity in the workplace. This aligns with UAE regulations and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities) commitments – AAU explicitly works in tandem with national guidelines to ensure a fair, inclusive environment free from discrimination for its employees aau.ac.ae. In practical terms, this means hiring and advancement at AAU are based on merit without bias, and the institution values diversity among its faculty/staff.

Moreover, AAU organizes **training sessions and awareness workshops** to build cultural competency and inclusive practices among faculty and staff (as well as students). For instance, the Deanship of Student Affairs in Abu Dhabi campus hosted an *awareness lecture titled "Inclusion of People of Determination in the UAE Society"* in 2025, presented by a psychologist from a national disability support organization students.aau.ac.ae. The lecture highlighted the concept of "People of Determination," the challenges individuals with disabilities face, and key government and community initiatives supporting their inclusion students.aau.ac.ae. Such events

educate AAU's community (including instructors and administrators) on how to better integrate and support persons with disabilities in education and campus life. In the College of Engineering, a "*Universal Design for Inclusion*" workshop was conducted to promote inclusivity in engineering solutions. This workshop emphasized the **importance of empathy** in developing innovative, inclusive designs, with special focus on understanding the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities engineering.aau.ac.ae. By involving faculty and students in these discussions, AAU nurtures an institutional culture that is sensitive to the needs of underrepresented groups.

Awareness Lecture on Inclusion of People of Determination in the UAE Society



The Deanship of Student Affairs at Al Ain University – Abu Dhabi Campus organized an awareness lecture titled “Inclusion of People of Determination in the UAE Society”, Presented by Mr. Ameen Al Attas, Psychologist at Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination, as part of its initiatives aimed at raising social awareness and promoting a culture of inclusivity among students, faculty, and administrative staff.

The lecture highlighted the concept of “People of Determination,” officially adopted in the UAE in 2017, which shifts from a deficit-based view to a positive perspective focusing on determination, achievement, and abilities. It also shed light on key challenges faced by this group, including misconceptions, limited job opportunities, and the lack of suitable infrastructure, while showcasing various government and community initiatives that support their empowerment.

Among the initiatives discussed were relevant legislation and policies, the People of Determination Card, the efforts of Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination, and the role of community associations in supporting and empowering this group.

The event witnessed strong engagement from attendees, with students raising insightful questions that reflect growing awareness and genuine interest in the issues and support mechanisms related to People of Determination.

Finally, AAU encourages its faculty and staff to continuously engage in professional development around diversity and inclusion. Whether through internal seminars or external collaborations, the university supports initiatives that equip educators and staff with the skills to create inclusive classrooms and workplace environments. This comprehensive approach – from women’s leadership programs to disability inclusion training – demonstrates AAU’s ongoing commitment in the last few years to foster a campus that supports students, staff, and faculty from underrepresented groups. All these mentoring, counseling, and peer support programs ensure that everyone at AAU has access to guidance and resources in a welcoming, inclusive setting.