

Frequently Asked Questions

PROJECT QATAR

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Introduction

Welcome to Cognition Education Limited and the 'Education for a New Era' project – the Qatar project in support of school reform. This is a very exciting and challenging time for everyone and we want to provide you with as much assistance and information as we can, as you take up your position with us.

The material we are providing here is in no way meant to be comprehensive in answering all the many questions you will have about living and working in Qatar, the schools you will be in, where you will be living - and the job you will be doing, but we hope that this will be a start. It should also guide you into getting the most out of the induction you will have into Cognition – the organisation, the project, and our team.

People are coming into this project from New Zealand, other Cognition contracts in Qatar and other countries. Our organisation is grounded in our New Zealand experience and very much enriched by the international knowledge and understanding that team members bring.

Thank you for your commitment to us. We know that for many of you, this represents a great upheaval in your life, not just for you but also for family members.

We hope therefore that these answers to frequently asked questions will set your mind at rest on many points. Be reassured, however, that our induction, both in New Zealand and in Qatar, will be comprehensive, and will add the detail that is not included here.

Contracts and Work

SO WHERE ARE THE SCHOOLS LOCATED?

In 2008-2009 we are supporting 13 schools in Qatar. This will change for the 2009-2010 school year as our school allocation has not been finalised. All of our staff reside in Doha, which is the capital city. The schools we support are scattered around Doha and the outlying suburbs. Cognition has directly supported 47 schools since 2004 as well as worked with others in similar contracts.

HOW WILL I UNDERSTAND PEOPLE? WILL TEACHERS SPEAK ENGLISH?

Some will have good English and most will have little or no English. All teachers are expected to reach high standards of English capability now very fast indeed, and this is a huge demand on them – and us - especially in the curriculum areas of maths and science.

The curriculum standards for Qatar were written by a British consultancy, CFBT, and the aim is for English to become the language of instruction.

We do have a translator in every school to assist in both written and verbal areas. New Zealanders tend to talk very fast, and we need to slow down. We also need to be aware of the use of NZ education terminology and colloquialisms.

We suggest electronically stored resources (flash drives, CDs) will assist you in the first weeks (see also last page).

WHO CAN I GO TO FOR SUPPORT IN MY WORK?

If you have any issues, there are many people to assist, from the Project Director to HR support. However, this is a commercial contract with a client who expects quality delivery, and it's a very different world from teaching in a New Zealand school. The induction will take you through some of the issues you are likely to meet and how you can access appropriate support. We do expect people to have resilience, a degree of independence, and be resourceful in this new, challenging, but very satisfying environment. Your Project Director/Country Manager, Professional Lead Advisor or Senior Management Advisor (SMA) in the school you work at as well as your buddy and colleagues are all there to support you.

ARE THERE RESTRICTIONS ON WHAT I AM ALLOWED TO WEAR OR NOT WEAR?

Yes, there is a dress code that all people are required to adhere to. It is really important to understand this and accept it. For women at school, you must wear long skirts and modest tops. For men at school, a business suit with tie is mandatory. Cognition is known for its high standard of dress. In public, it pays to dress conservatively to respect local custom and not attract attention to yourself. Three quarter pants for both men and women and a t shirt is a safe bet. It is a conservative society and the school staff and principals expect these standards of dress, and compliance is a condition of your contract. You do not need to veil or wear an abaya (a black over garment) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abaya> but many, if not all, of the school staff will do so, especially in the presence of men.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I'M FULFILLING MY WORK REQUIREMENTS?

There is a performance management system, and the company has a contract with the client that we must fulfil through your work in the schools. We will take you through those work requirements, the tasks, the key delivery points, as well as the reporting and feedback processes. These will all help you monitor your own work and progress in the school. Measuring progress is a vital part of the contract, as raising levels of student achievement is the ultimate goal of the reform.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T MAKE THE DEADLINES FOR WORK FINISHED?

Again, the performance management system operates, but there are many checks and systems in place which do as much as possible to ensure that this does not happen, as it would put the contract at risk. Our work is monitored by ourselves, as well as the client's monitoring agency, who visit all the schools and report on progress. Our own evaluation and quality assurance process will begin at the start of the contract, and again, we will work through this with you in the weeks before you start in the schools. It will be a support mechanism, so that you will know what is expected of you and your team, and so that we have consistency of quality delivery of our support across all 13 schools.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I GET OFFERED ANOTHER JOB – BETTER THAN THE ONE I HAVE?

You are bound by your contract which makes it clear that you cannot work for an opposition company within 6 months or with a company where Cognition has an interest.

Culture & Religion

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RELIGION?

Islam is the official religion of Qatar. The Wahabi sect of Sunni Islam is the dominant form of Islam in this part of the world but Qatar is tolerant of other faiths. The first official Christian Church opened in Qatar in 2007.

Many local people will like you to ask questions and will probably give you books to read. Respect for Islam is critical to our success in building relationships. You will hear phrases such as “Al Hamdill’allah” which means praise to God and “Insha’allah” which means ‘If God wills it’. Phrases like ‘I will see you tomorrow’ are followed instantly by the qualifier: If God wills it.

If you are Christian in belief you may not proselytise or try to convert, and if you wear a Christian symbol, you must not have it visible. On the other hand, people of faith are welcomed, and there is more that unites Islam and Christianity than we generally are aware of. Faith is part of everyday life. The call to prayer starts and closes the day. Prayer for Moslems is five times a day. Many schools will have a mosque on site for the boys. Women usually pray at home or in a quiet place.

Be sensitive to religious practice and social norms. Start with using your right hand only for accepting food and water and eating. This will show respect and understanding. Placing a tissue over your left hand allows you to place food on it while you use your right hand but do not eat with your left if you possibly can avoid it. Tissues are nearly always provided, and you will be given tea and coffee and food frequently. Always accept your hosts generosity.

WHAT IS RAMADAN?

Ramadan is the Islamic time of fasting which lasts for 1 month from sunrise until sunset. It is a time of cleansing when no food or water passes the lips of people; ie: no-one eats or drinks – good time of discipline! It is based on the lunar calendar, so it shifts each year. In 2008, it started in September and was a challenge as it was still very hot, and the teachers in the schools, as well as the older students, got very tired, especially towards the end of the month. In 2009, Ramadan will occur in the holidays in August, and then in July in 2010, so this is a chance to experience the full impact and the cultural and religious significance of Ramadan in the Middle East.

It is likely the school day will be shorter than usual, but our team is still expected to work a full day.

CAN WE EAT AND DRINK OVER RAMADAN?

Not in public during daylight hours - including outside your house, or in the car. At your school the principal may make a room available to the team for eating and drinking but this will not happen in all schools. The principal will decide. Staff and students will be impressed if you observe this period of fasting.

WHAT IS EID?

Eid is the celebration which marks the end of Ramadan. It is a real festival. So is the beginning of Ramadan. People greet each other with fervour, welcoming this special time.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PITFALLS IN COMMUNICATION?

Insha’allah..... you won’t make any mistakes, but people understand. Learn some of the language even if it’s just the courtesies, such as greetings and farewells. Again, it shows respect and sensitivity to the fact that we are entering their culture, their country, their schools and their lives.

WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY AND WHAT SHOULD YOU NOT SAY?

Do not use swear words in any context, or criticise the religion or the leadership of the country; ie: anything related to culture, religion, or to the government – even on the computer. Remember that systems can and are monitored. Learn a bit of Arabic, at least. Don’t talk about alcohol outside of your home. Do be prepared to talk about family and do a lot of waiting while others talk. It’s an oral culture, not a written one. Expect interruptions, circular discussion, repetition, and lots of phone calls in meetings.

WHAT IS THE CUSTOM IF YOU ARE INVITED TO A LOCAL'S HOME FOR DINNER?

Take a box of chocolates or small present. They may eat on the floor. The right hand is used for food and drink. The meal may be segregated, with men in one room and women in another. You should try most foods as it is impolite to refuse.

Do not offer your hand to a member of the opposite sex. If a Qatari does offer you his or her hand, offer your hand. You should just touch the hand and no more in response. A handshake is reserved for male to male, female to female; once you become close, there may well be kisses cheek to cheek, but again only within the gender.

Never make comment about a woman to a man, even if it is a compliment. This includes his wife or daughter. You should also not admire personal belongings or possessions.

IS THERE A 'SOCIAL' STRUCTURE AMONGST THE QATARI

Yes, some are very rich, others not so well off. All Qatari are encouraged to go to work but the wealth of the country is, of course, extreme and highly visible in Doha. There are several very influential families close to the royal family. Many young men do not see the need to work and the government is working hard to change these attitudes.

Families in the areas we work in have a range of social problems that we are familiar with back home. Drugs and alcohol are absolutely forbidden, but unemployment and single parenting contribute to an uneven wealth distribution, especially in the more rural and/or/Bedouin communities.

There are leading families in Qatar, many linked to the royal Al Thani family.

IS THERE ANYTHING I SHOULD BRING FROM NEW ZEALAND THAT I COULD TAKE TO PLACES IF I AM ASKED?

Yes, bring souvenirs if you wish, such as small items like, paua, greenstone, pictures of New Zealand and pictures of family.

Finances

HOW DO WE GO ABOUT SETTING UP BANK ACCOUNTS?

You cannot set up a bank account until you have residency. Then you can go to any bank; eg: Standard Chartered Bank and HSBC which are present in Qatar as well as local banks.

DO WE KEEP OUR BANK ACCOUNT IN NZ?

Yes, your salary will be entered into your bank account in NZ or by other arrangement if that is negotiated by you at employment agreement signing time.

Housing

WHERE WILL I LIVE AND WHAT WILL THE ACCOMMODATION BE LIKE? WILL I BE ON MY OWN OR WITH OTHER TEAM MEMBERS?

Cognition has leased apartments for team members. There are several blocks of housing, so no one will be living on their own, but we are not all grouped together in one main building.

IS THE HOUSING CONSISTENT IN STYLE?

The housing is varied as it is in New Zealand. All apartments are very comfortable, with either 2 or 3 bedrooms. No apartment block has more than six floors.

HOW IS ACCOMMODATION ALLOCATED?

The Project Director and the Professional Leader have placed people in accommodation. The following factors are taken into account: the location of their school, how many children are involved and the marital status of the consultant, etc.

CAN I FIND MY OWN ACCOMMODATION?

No, the company provides this. We do not want anyone to be faced with the problem of finding their own, and we have secured enough leases for everyone.

WHAT IS IN THE APARTMENT?

The accommodation is fully furnished with a common package of furniture, cupboards, desk, beds, tables and chairs, and all whiteware is provided. There will be linen, towels, crockery etc for you to start with, but you will, over time, want to add your own things and create your own style making it more like home. You can of course bring your own personal items and resources.

ARE THERE LOCAL TV CHANNELS?

Yes. If you want, there are a number of “pay to view” options similar to SKY in New Zealand. The cost varies but is similar to costs here - you pay around NZ\$ 90 per month. There are no DVD players in the apartments; however electrical equipment is very competitively priced. The region is Zone 2, but most DVDs are multi region and you should check this at purchase time. New Zealand is Zone 4.

WHAT ABOUT AIR CONDITIONING?

All accommodation has air conditioning, and most appliances are gas - you have all utilities paid for by the company - gas, power, internet, landline and water. International and lines calls are made at your own expense.

HOW CAN I CALL HOME?

It is very unusual nowadays to use landlines. Mobiles are carried and used by everyone. You will be given a mobile company phone on arrival. This phone is for work, and must be kept on at all times, and you will be given a money credit each month to keep it charged; once you use up this allowance, you will need to fund the phone yourself. Text messaging is widely used. You can call home electronically through “Skype” when that is set up on your laptop (in New Zealand) or on your own private mobile if you choose.

HOW FAR IS MY ACCOMMODATION FROM MY SCHOOL?

Just as this varies for everyone at home, so it varies for everyone here. A number of consultants may have to travel up to one hour (depending on traffic) to get to their school.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE HAVE A PROBLEM IN OUR APARTMENT, AND WHO DO WE GO TO?

You will be given a phone number of the person responsible for your apartment. There is also a team member who has the overall responsibility for such matters, and who will liaise with you. This information will be given to you, in the in-country induction.

Insurance

WHAT DOES MY HEALTH INSURANCE COVER?

We provide full medical cover. The policy will be outlined at induction and will be on your induction flash drive. Any claims between you and your insurer are between you and them. Cognition does not intervene between the insurer and the insured.

DO I NEED TRAVEL INSURANCE, WHERE/WHO DO I GO TO, TO GET IT?

When you take your own private holidays you need your own medical insurance. Cognition insures for travel to Qatar at the beginning and end of your contract when you travel home.

You should take travel insurance when you travel out of Qatar on holiday. Local travel agents or online travel websites are the best to use to organise local travel. Your first holiday is likely to be early in the new semester.

Medical

WHO/WHERE DO I GO TO IF I AM NOT WELL?

Doctor/Hospital: You will be provided with details on locations. Notify the Cognition office immediately.

Chemist or pharmacy shops (eg: in the malls) have a wider range of items than in New Zealand, and many medications are sold over the counter.

Any day you are absent from work must be accounted for, and you must let your SMA know. Leave forms for any absence at all must be completed promptly and filed in the office.

WHERE IS THE CLOSEST HOSPITAL?

Very good hospitals are close to all our accommodation, but on arrival we will recommend where you should go if you are unwell. Medical care is very good indeed. The insurers have a list of approved hospital care to use.

Residency/Visas

HOW DO I GET RESIDENCY?

Cognition will sort that out for you. It's a bureaucratic process and you will need to have provided all necessary documents to Cognition in NZ, unless you are already a resident, in which case you will go through a transfer process in-country.

HOW DOES MY SPOUSE (IF APPLICABLE) GET RESIDENCY?

Your spouse will be part of the process once you, as the employee, have got residency.

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL I GET RESIDENCY?

Approximately 6 weeks but the bureaucracy is alive and well in Qatar and it may (and probably will) take longer.

Safety and Emergency Procedures

WHAT EMERGENCY PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE?

All staff must be registered with the New Zealand embassy and we have standard emergency procedures in place, which you will be trained in on arrival. We do insist on people observing rules such as always having your mobile switched on. A phone tree will also be developed.

Qatar is a very safe place in terms of petty or serious crime. Theft is extremely rare and that honesty is carried over into courtesy and hospitality which are extended to all - but not always on the roads! New Zealand seems a very dangerous society after being in Qatar for a while. Penalties for misdemeanours are, however, very severe indeed.

In cases of a large scale emergency Cognition has developed crisis management policies and procedures to ensure all the safety of all staff. This information will be discussed at your induction.

DO WE HAVE A MAP AND PHONE NUMBER OF WHERE EVERYONE IS IN QATAR IF WE NEED TO CONTACT SOMEONE IN AN EMERGENCY?

Yes. There will also be a phone tree for emergencies. The crisis management manual also outlines procedures in any cases of a large scale emergency.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I HAVE A CAR ACCIDENT, HOW WILL MY FAMILY BE NOTIFIED?

See transport below. Cognition keeps a record of your contact details, next of kin.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I HAVE A FAMILY EMERGENCY IN NEW ZEALAND? HOW QUICKLY CAN I GET BACK?

Flights leave daily and it's a 24 hour flight to New Zealand or anywhere else in the world - at most, as Dubai are is a transport hub for worldwide travel. Bereavement leave is an entitlement in your contract, but of course the company responds to individual circumstances as much as possible under our own contract with the Supreme Education Council (SEC). You should ensure that the company has your next of kin details.

Social and Family

MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS

It is a requirement of local law to be married if you are living with your partner. Defacto relationships are not permitted under any circumstances

HOW DOES MY SPOUSE GO ABOUT GETTING A JOB?

That is over to you. The internet, newspapers are the usual ways people find employment, if not through personal contacts.

IS IT BETTER TO APPLY FOR A JOB FROM HERE OR WAIT TO GET TO QATAR?

People have successfully used both mechanisms.

WHICH ARE THE BEST SCHOOLS FOR OUR KIDS?

Your children can only attend international schools. You probably have started processes before you leave NZ for this, as places are scarce.

They are international fee paying schools are equivalent or higher with NZ private schools. Cognition will contribute towards school fees for up to two school aged children.

HOW OFTEN DO WE HAVE SOCIAL EVENTS?

There are formal Cognition events, such as at Christmas, ANZAC Day, and at the end of year. We hope a social committee will assist with informal social gatherings for the team. We know that the social interaction across the team adds a really positive atmosphere, and there are plenty of things to do as a team - 4 wheel driving or camping in the desert

Christmas Day and Easter may of course fall on working days and this time is given off at the discretion of our client

We expect that people support the social committee and the events they will help organise.

WHERE CAN I GO TO GET EXERCISE?

There are a variety of clubs that you can join that have a gymnasium, and often a swimming pool. Most of the clubs are attached to the hotels. The cost varies according to family, gender, length of time etc, but they are very good places to relax in and to socialize. In the months from about October through to May, walking, jogging, cycling etc are all very enjoyable.

Wearing sports gear for exercise outdoors is fine. It is very safe for women exercising outdoors - much more so than in New Zealand.

It is too hot outdoors from about May to October to exercise outside. All accommodation is air-conditioned. Schools are air-conditioned but often you will be walking outside from classroom block to block.

Bring several pairs of sunglasses or buy cheap ones here. You will need them. The glare is very hard on eyes, especially when exercising for longer periods outdoors.

WHAT CAN I WEAR WHEN I GO SWIMMING?

Just wear your normal swimwear, but there are restrictions on where you can go swimming and where you cannot. Swimming pools in clubs or hotels are western in a leisure/dress sense. At beaches, modesty is always wise, even those distant from Doha.

HOW CAN WE GET ALCOHOL?

You cannot legally get alcohol until you are resident. After you gain residency, you then will need a salary statement from the company, which you will need if you are legally to access the distribution centres which sell alcohol.

You may drink alcohol in hotels and hotel bars. Most of the big western hotels have bars and clubs. Some smaller hotels are dry. You cannot purchase or drink alcohol during Ramadan.

WHAT ARE DRINKING AND DRIVING RULES?

There is zero tolerance to drinking and driving. There are severe penalties including jail and deportation if you drink in a public place or are clearly under the influence of alcohol. Take a taxi to a function where there will be alcohol, and return by taxi - do not drink and drive. Drugs are absolutely forbidden.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE GET CAUGHT?

Cognition expects you to abide by all laws of the country. This includes the use of alcohol. If your drinking becomes a police matter, you should expect to be deported at best. You may not then enter the country again, even as a tourist in the future. While Qatar can come across as a relatively Western country in its air of relaxed behaviour, this is very superficial.

Technology

WHAT INTERNET CONNECTIONS DO WE NEED FOR SKYPE?

A member of the IT team will take you through information at induction.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY COMPUTER PACKS A SAD?

There is IT support “in country” but our people need to be as self sufficient as possible. If you are not IT literate and find an excel spreadsheet or formatting a document a challenge, we strongly advise you to take lessons, or get assistance as much as possible before you leave. Computer glitches can be major sources of frustration for everyone, especially when they are minor issues which can be resolved with some good basic computer knowledge and skill.

You will be using your computer for reports, a record of your work, meeting your contract demands, and of course it is your link to your world of family and friends. If you bring your resources electronically on a flash drive or CD, you can then download onto your computer later.

Heat and difficult conditions take their toll of computers, so it is essential to take care of them and ensure you know how to back up all material. An IT team member will discuss this further at induction.

Schools may or may not have internet access. Your accommodation will, but there may be delays. Expect this to be sorted as soon as we can, but not on Day One (or two.) The same and possibly more so is true with the schools, although we have been assured that the authorities will be quicker this year with internet access to schools, and the essential hardware and software for teachers.

Transport

WHAT DOES PETROL COST?

In NZ\$ equivalents, petrol is around 40 cents per litre.

WHAT TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS WILL THERE BE WHEN I GET TO DOHA? HOW WILL I GET AROUND?

At the start of the contract, you will be using taxis round town (cheap, round NZ\$ 2-8 across town) or the company will be ferrying you.

Under some contracts, a car and driver is provided for groups of around 3-4 for four weeks at the start.

HOW WILL I GET AROUND UNTIL I GET MY RESIDENCY?

Taxi and/or a leased vehicle using your NZ license + international drivers license which you should obtain from the AA in NZ before you depart.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I PAY FOR A TAXI?

Taxis have meters and very cheap, reliable and safe. Most drivers are Indian or Sri Lankan and extremely courteous, but may have little or no English. Women should sit in the back seat. Taxi fare is generally between QR5 and QR15; ie: between NZ\$2-8 and a small tip is usual.

WHAT IS THE BEST TAXI COMPANY?

There are no legally private taxis - they are all government ones. All should have meters. 'Karwa' taxis are easily identifiable by colour and logo. Their number is 4588888.

You will find non-government drivers at malls offering you a taxi ride - usually a bit dearer than government taxis.

Limousine taxi services can be used, but be warned the price can be double or more than the normal fare.

WHERE DO I GO TO GET MY QATAR DRIVERS LICENSE?

You will not be able to get your driver's license until you are a resident and you will be shown how to go about that. You do need to get your International Drivers Licence at the AA before you leave NZ - and bring both your NZ and your International licences with you. Bring several passport style photos with you - at least a dozen.

WHAT IS TRAFFIC LIKE?

Generally good. Fast, on the open roads, with a limit of 120 but this is nearly always surpassed by locals. Roads are in very good condition but in Qatar, many roads are still under reconstruction. Driving is on the opposite side of the road from NZ and it does take time to adjust. It's good to start driving early on a Friday morning when the roads are very quiet, and you can find your way round and take on the roundabouts without traffic to add to the tension.

WHAT ARE THE RULES IF ANYONE HAS A CAR ACCIDENT?

Any accident is immediately a police matter and you must never leave the scene – Cognition will cover such processes at induction in-country, but you must immediately notify Cognition management. You may move your car off the road if it is still moveable. Unaccompanied women are advised to contact a male to support them.

Where to find

HOW DO I FIND OUT WHAT TO DO AND WHERE TO GO?

There are books on Qatar in the libraries. There are also excellent internet sites including:

<http://www.english.education.gov.qa> (SEC Website)

<http://www.experienceqatar.com/>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>

<http://www.qatar-info.com>

A good book is “Qatar: The Business Travellers Handbook”

WHERE CAN I BUY MAPS?

Maps will be provided to you when you arrive. You will also be given the location of your school and taken to it as part of your induction before you actually start at the school.

HOW DO I RECEIVE AND SEND MAIL?

The address to give everyone at home is Multi Serve Cognition Consulting, PO Box 18030, Doha, Qatar.

You can send mail from local post office but arrival time at destination can be variable.

What to bring

WHAT SHOULD WE BRING WITH US?

Reminders of home, small, and easily transportable. Bring photos of friends and family to keep you company. Your own mobile may be preferable if it takes a sim card. Music is best downloaded onto an iPod.

If you have small children, bring some toys to occupy kids in the first couple of weeks (books, DVDs, games). DVD players are cheap here. Most things you have at home are readily available here.

Bring resources for work if you can store them electronically; ie: load up a flash drive. Hard copy resources are very tough on weight limits when travelling! Bring resources you rely on, that you feel have generic use for good teaching and learning rather than relating to a NZ context. Familiar resources especially at the start will reassure you. CDs and flash drives can safely store those familiar items.

Schools will have text books for the new curriculum. It will be the task of the school team to select other resources, both book and non book, using a budget that the school will be assigned.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we know there will be many other questions we have not answered here, and we look forward to seeing you at induction for more information sharing.

We hope that this experience with us in Doha will be one where your own expertise and knowledge is invaluable, but that you also find a great sense of reward, satisfaction, and feel your own growth and learning, both personally and professionally.