

REQUIREMENTS

for

OMAN'S SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This document contains the requirements for a new system of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

PART ONE sets out the standards for Oman's system of Quality Assurance and places these standards in an international context. The first section of Part One, on Oman's standards, organised into three chapters, describes in detail:

- 1) What kinds of institutions are recognised (**Chapter One: Classification of Institutions of Higher Education**);
- 2) What awards they may offer and what outcomes are expected (**Chapter Two: Oman's National Qualifications Framework**); and
- 3) How institutions are established and legitimised (**Chapter Three: Procedures for Approval and Accreditation**).

The second section of Part One, in Chapter Four, places the standards for Oman's system of Quality Assurance in the context of international standards of good practice. It describes sample performance indicators for all significant areas of activity to be benchmarked against the performance of appropriate international institutions.

PART TWO contains two procedural handbooks to guide both Institutions and External Review Panels through the requirements for:

- 1) Institutional Accreditation
- 2) Programme Accreditation

The guidelines are designed to ensure a common understanding of expectations by institutions and external reviewers. An equally important function is to assist institutions in their internal planning and quality assurance arrangements.

An Annex contains definitions of the key terms used in the document.

The Appendices contain application forms for establishing and accrediting institutions and programmes; for changing the classification of an institution and for major and minor changes to programme offerings.

Oman's system of Higher Education is coming of age; and, as recognised in the opening speech for the University of the 21st Century Conference:

“Education has become ... a basic pillar of Oman’s future vision of economic and social development in addition to other major social and cultural roles that target establishment of an enlightened society with an awareness of its duties and rights.

Building on this, the Sultanate has given attention to structuring an effective and distinguished higher education system through development of appropriate policies and mechanisms and the provision of resources required for the achievement of the ambitious objectives.”

Now that the structure of the system of Higher Education has been established with more than fifty institutions offering programmes to approximately forty thousand students, the Sultanate is appropriately turning its attention to the quality of that system in the context of the challenges of our globalised world with its rapidly accelerating knowledge economy based on information technologies.

PART ONE: SECTION I:

STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

In Higher Education in The Sultanate Of Oman

Chapter One:

Classification of Institutions

PART ONE: SECTION I: STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN OMAN

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PART ONE: SECTION I:

STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

Chapter One: Classification of Institutions

i. Background to the Classification System

The classification system sets the standards for recognition of an institution as meriting the designation of “Institution of Higher Education”. It further specifies what kinds of institutions may be recognised as: 1) Universities, 2) University Colleges and 3) Colleges of Higher Education. The system includes a careful distinction between the criteria for Universities and for University Colleges, both of which offer graduate degrees.

The *university* designation must be supported by evidence of rigorous standards. One of the key defining characteristics is substantial engagement in the conduct of research. In the global environment, research is essential for competitive economic development and has been given priority in the Sultanate’s Five Year plans. Credible research activity is important also for the external reputation of the system of Higher Education as a whole, since Universities are at the top of the system and the international standing of Universities is heavily dependent on the quality of their research.

A *University* must have at least three major fields of study and a significant research component. Because of the need for equitable access throughout the Sultanate, new private Universities were approved for the major regional cities of Sohar, Nizwa and Salalah, as well as for the capital, Muscat.

A *University College* is expected to share some of the key characteristics of a University. These characteristics include research activity relevant to local and national needs; appropriate research facilities; and, programmes up to and including the Master’s degree in at least two broad fields of study.

To merit the University College designation an institution must have reasonable investment in research equipment and laboratories, as well as staffing to support the research function.

The term *College of Higher Education* is used generically to refer to teaching institutions which offer programmes up to and including the Bachelor’s degree,

though such institutions are not always called “Colleges”. They may be termed “Institutes” or “Academies” or similar.

ii. Diversity of Institutions

Higher Education programmes are offered by a variety of institutions in Oman, both public and private. Some have partnership arrangements with outside institutions, while others operate independently. Some institutions offer a wide range of programmes and others specialise in certain fields.

This diversity has the advantage of offering a range of choice for students. At the same time, diversity also creates the possibility of confusion, unless the nature and responsibilities of different types of organisation are clearly understood.

Within their different mandates, institutions of Higher Education have common responsibilities. All institutions of Higher Education must accept primary responsibility for the quality and relevance of their programmes and services. This responsibility remains with the institution itself, regardless of any partnership that institution may have with external organisations.

In the exercise of this responsibility to ensure quality and relevance, all institutions of Higher Education must develop *Quality Improvement Plans*. All Institutions are required periodically to conduct and report on self-assessments which include compliance with standards of good practice, and comparisons of their own performance with that of recognised institutions of similar type in Oman and abroad. They must be able to demonstrate to independent External Review Panels the effectiveness of their quality assurance arrangements.

The standards of student achievement required for a given academic award are the same regardless of the type of institution offering the award. These standards are specified in the Oman Qualifications Framework in Chapter Two of this document. Institutions must establish mechanisms to ensure that the expectations of the Framework are met, that standards of student achievement are comparable to those of appropriate international universities, and that programmes of professional education provide the knowledge and skills required for professional practice in Oman and abroad, as appropriate

While the requirements for given academic awards are the same for all categories of institution, there are differences in the range of programmes offered by different categories of institution; in the level of awards which can be offered; in the degree to which accreditation of programmes may be delegated; in expectations for scholarship and for research; and in the resources necessary to support scholarship and research.

The sections below summarise characteristics of the three types of higher education institution: Colleges of Higher Education, University Colleges, and Universities.

iii. Characteristics of Colleges of Higher Education

a) Introduction

Higher Education Colleges are primarily teaching institutions, offering programmes up to and including the Bachelor's degree. Some offer a variety of programmes, while others are specialist institutions, offering programmes in one or two professional fields, such as teaching, nursing, engineering or business studies. Note that the term "College" is used in a generic sense and includes institutions of Higher Education which have names such as "Academy" or "Institute" and which match the description of Higher Education Colleges.

In addition to formal award courses, Higher Education Colleges frequently provide courses in areas such as English Language, Business and IT. These may be stand-alone courses, or may contribute towards a diploma or degree offered by the institution. The concentration on teaching in Higher Education Colleges means that the quality of teaching and learning should be high.

The chief executive officer of a Higher Education College should meet standards required for a senior academic appointment, including substantial academic and administrative experience. The usual title for the chief executive officer is *Dean*. The titles of President, Rector or Vice Chancellor should not be used for the head of a Higher Education College.

Standards for the Bachelor's degree require students to acquire knowledge and skills that are up-to-date with the latest developments in their disciplines. This means that academic staff must keep abreast of research and professional practice in their field.

While a Higher Education College would not normally have an established research role, scholarship expected of staff would include activities such as:

- Part time study for a Master's degree or Doctorate through a university;
- Reading, and providing reports on current research in their field;
- Teaching courses to employed professionals on the latest developments in their field;
- Short term outside professional secondments to enable staff to keep up-to-date with developments in professional practice;

- Authorship of articles and textbooks;
- Attendance at courses or conferences in a subject discipline, or in teaching-related fields, such as curriculum and assessment;
- Action research projects in cooperation with industry or the profession; and,
- Involvement in projects to transfer relevant skills and technologies to organisations in the community.

b) Main Characteristics of a Higher Education College

1. Level and Range of Programmes

- May be accredited to offer programmes up to and including the level of the Bachelor's degree;
- May conduct undergraduate programmes in one or more broad fields of learning; and,
- May offer a wide range of community and professional courses at the undergraduate level, on a flexible basis to meet community requirements and support lifelong learning.

2. Accreditation of Programmes

- Accepts responsibility for its own awards and standards of quality. This may be in association or partnership with a recognised university.
- Ensures that programmes incorporate the latest professional and technological developments, as well as insights from research in the major fields of study at the college.
- May be delegated responsibility for minor changes to accredited programmes, subject to conditions established by the Accreditation Board.

3. Scholarship and Research

- Ensures that academic staff are engaged in scholarly activities and remain up-to-date with the latest developments in their field;

- Provides services to professional groups and local communities, drawing on the academic and professional expertise available in the institution;
- Implements a staffing structure in which at least 75% of all academic staff, and all staff teaching at levels three and four have Master's or Doctoral degrees, and about two thirds of academic staff are employed full time on contracts of at least three years.

4. Scale of Activity

- There is no specific size requirement, but the scale of operation must be sufficient for the College to meet the specified quality standards in all areas of activity.

iv. Characteristics of University Colleges

a) Introduction

University Colleges have a strong commitment to excellence in teaching. They offer postgraduate programmes up to and including Master's degree studies and are required to engage in research. The resources and infrastructure required to adequately support University College research and postgraduate programmes are such that University Colleges are usually larger and more expensive to operate than Higher Education Colleges. In particular, library holdings, including journals and internet access to research networks must be substantially greater. Equipment and facilities for staff and student research must be more extensive.

Master's degree programmes at University Colleges may include research degrees. Academic staff for Master's research degree programmes should be involved actively in research at the forefront of their discipline and should be proficient in utilising international research networks. Where advanced professional programmes are offered, the academic staff involved should have extensive relevant professional experience at a senior level, as well as appropriate academic qualifications.

The chief executive officer of a University College should meet standards required for a senior academic appointment, including substantial academic and administrative experience. The head of a University College would normally be designated as *Dean*. The title of President, Rector or Vice chancellor should not be used.

The research undertaken by a University College may vary according to the nature of the programmes offered and the research interests of staff. Nevertheless, the research profile should be consistent with the fields of study offered, the development requirements of the region in which the institution is

located, and the mission of the institution. Subject to these variations, research undertaken by a University College will normally have the following characteristics. It is:

- applied, rather than basic;
- unlikely to require substantial high capital cost resources;
- related mainly to professional practice;
- of local and national significance; and,
- relevant to the community served by the institution.

The scholarly activities of staff must be such that there is confidence that they are actively engaged with latest developments in their academic or professional fields, and that they apply knowledge gained for the benefit of students and the community. In addition to scholarly activities, the following activities might be expected of staff of a University College:

- post-doctoral research;
- relevant consultancy;
- publication of articles in refereed journals and conference proceedings;
- presentation of papers to national and regional academic conferences;
- writing and broadcasting on relevant matters from their discipline for lay audiences;
- examination of Master's dissertations for external students; and,
- design and delivery of elements of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes based on individual research.

b) Main Characteristics of a University College:

1. Level and Range of Programmes

- Offers accredited programmes up to and including the Master's degree level;
- Conducts undergraduate programmes in at least two broad fields of study; and postgraduate programmes in at least one;
- May offer a range of professional courses up to the equivalent of the Master's level on a flexible basis to meet professional requirements and support lifelong learning; and,
- Ensures effective integration of research and teaching in postgraduate programmes.

2. Accreditation of Programmes

- Accepts responsibility for its own awards and quality standards. This may be in association or partnership with a recognised university.
- May have delegated responsibility for specific types of changes to accredited programmes, subject to conditions established by the Accreditation Board.
- Uses external examiners for dissertations written by Master's research degree students.

3. Scholarship and Research

- Has a clearly defined research strategy relevant to the fields of study in which postgraduate programmes are offered, as well as in areas relevant to the local community. Provides regular reports on the implementation of the research strategy.
- Provides adequate facilities, including library and learning resources, laboratories and equipment, for research to be carried out by academic staff and students in the fields in which major programmes are offered.
- Ensures that academic staff are engaged in advanced scholarly activities.

4. Scale of Activity

- It is expected that, unless generous funding is available, an institution with less than 1,250 equivalent full time students of whom at least 1000 are in higher education award courses, would face major difficulties in meeting the requirements for University College status, especially the range of programmes and research activity. A minimum enrolment of 2,500 students is usually necessary to achieve an economy of scale.

v. Characteristics of Universities

a) Introduction:

Universities have a demonstrated commitment to the development and transmission of knowledge through research, scholarly publication, teaching, and community service, in all fields in which they operate.

Teaching at all levels should reflect the latest developments in research, as well as the application of knowledge with new educational techniques. Teaching and research are seen as interdependent functions.

The frame of reference for a University is national and international, and this should be reflected in the nature of research and scholarly inquiry. Adequate resources and facilities must be available to support advanced inquiry so that staff and students can contribute to development of knowledge in the national and international contexts. Staff are actively involved in international research networks. Substantially greater resources are required for library holdings, linkages with the international research community, and for research equipment.

The university administration reflects the academic maturity and intellectual independence of the institution. Considerable academic authority is given to an academic board and rigorous mechanisms must be in place to ensure that high academic and professional standards are maintained.

The chief executive officer of a University should meet standards required for a senior academic appointment, including substantial academic and administrative experience. The title accorded a chief executive officer of a University would normally be President, Rector or Vice Chancellor.

Research undertaken by universities normally will:

- include basic, as well as applied research;
- involve some activity that requires high capital cost resources;
- not be limited to particular occupational or professional fields;
- have national and international significance; and,
- support national development priorities.

The scholarly activities of staff reflect this broader agenda. In addition to the activities described above in relation to University Colleges, the following activities are expected normally of University staff:

- Publication in internationally recognised academic journals;
- Presentation of papers to international academic conferences;
- Involvement in international research partnerships with scholars in appropriate outside universities;
- Conduct of basic research in the main fields in which the university offers postgraduate programmes, including some fields requiring high capital investment;
- Development of inter-disciplinary approaches to research; and
- Provision of expert advice and senior consultancy to government departments, in Oman and elsewhere, as well as to appropriate international organisations.

b) Main Characteristics of a University

1. Level and Range of Programmes

- Offers accredited programmes up to and including the masters and or doctoral level;
- Conducts undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in faculties representing at least three broad fields of learning;
- Arranges conferences and other programmes in advanced professional practice in cooperation with international professional bodies; and,
- Ensures effective integration of research and teaching in all programme areas through independent verification procedures.

2. Accreditation of Programmes

- Accepts responsibility for its own awards and quality standards. While the initial development of a university may involve sponsorship or a supportive affiliation with a partner institution, any continuing relationship should be one of equal partnership and mutual benefit. A University will normally have a number of different collaborative arrangements with research agencies and international universities.
- May be delegated substantial responsibility for accreditation of its own programmes and academic awards, subject to conditions established by the Accreditation Board.
- Uses external examiners for dissertations, theses or major projects by higher degree students.

3. Scholarship and Research

- Has a clearly defined research strategy relevant to national requirements and to the mission of the University, establishes benchmarks of performance, and provides regular reports on implementation of the strategy.
- Provides adequate facilities, including library resources, laboratories and equipment, for research to be carried out by academic staff and students.
- Ensures that all academic staff are engaged in scholarly activities of an advanced nature appropriate to a university, and remain up-to-date with latest developments in their fields.

- Provides services to local, national and international communities, drawing on research networks and the advanced academic and professional expertise available in the institution.
- Implements a staffing structure in which at least 75% of all academic staff, and all staff teaching at the degree level have Doctorates. In professional programmes, part time staff without doctorates but with extensive professional experience may be included where appropriate in teaching teams. About two thirds of academic staff should be employed full time on contracts of at least three years.

4. Scale of Activity

- It is expected that unless generous funding is available an institution with less than 2,500 equivalent full time students of whom at least 2,000 are in Higher Education award courses would face major difficulties in meeting the requirements for the University range of programmes and research expectations. Normally a minimum enrolment of 5,000 students is required to realise the benefit of economy of scale.

Vi Note re Professional Associations

A professional association or similar body established outside of Oman may make arrangements with a local organisation (not an institution of Higher Education) to serve as a local delivery agent for an international organisation to offer a technical or professional programme in Oman. Where this occurs, the association and the local agent may not be regarded as a Higher Education institution of Oman.

No programme carrying a degree designation may be offered in Oman unless the Accreditation Board is satisfied that it meets all the requirements of the Qualifications Framework for the award, including standards for teaching and learning resources available to students in Oman.

Vii Procedures for Changing the Classification of an Institution

a) Changes in Higher Education College and University College Status

An institution may apply for a change in its classification from College of Higher Education to University College (or, in unusual cases, from University College to College of Higher Education).

A change from College of Higher Education to University College requires the approval of the Council of Higher Education. Before an application can be considered by the Council, a report on the application must be provided by the responsible Ministry through the Ministry of Higher Education. An external review will be conducted by a Review Panel appointed by the Accreditation Board to assess whether or not the institution meets the requirements of the new category. The recommendations from both the Accreditation Board and the Ministry of Higher Education will be considered by the Council.

Initial accreditation in a new classification, if granted, will be provisional. If accreditation at the new level is denied or revoked by a decision of the Council of Higher Education on the recommendation of the Accreditation Board, the institution will revert to its former classification. Students enrolled in programmes which the institution is no longer authorised to offer must be relocated appropriately at the expense of the institution.

Applications from existing institutions for a change to the University College designation will be considered only in cases where there is an exemplary record, with high standards of student achievement over an extended period of time and where the institution has demonstrated its ability to meet the higher requirements of a University College. This should involve completion of one full five year cycle of successful external review.

University Colleges which were approved under the previous regulations, and which cannot meet the new requirements, must revert to Higher Education College status. Within 12 months of the effective date of the new regulations, University Colleges wishing to retain the University College designation will be assessed against the new requirements; and will be given accreditation only if the expert review panel is confident that they meet the new criteria.

b) Establishment of a University Incorporating Colleges

An institution may not be upgraded to the status of a University through the process described above for the achievement of University College status by a College of Higher Education. Establishing a University is considered as a major new undertaking. Nevertheless, a proposal to establish a new University may involve incorporation of existing institutions of Higher Education into a new university organisation.

A proposal for a private University must be assessed by the Ministry of Higher Education who will submit a report to the Council of Higher Education. The assessment by the Ministry will include advice from experienced senior academic administrators from appropriate international universities. The proposal and the report from the Ministry will be considered by the Council of Higher Education, and a decision made on whether the University should be established. If the

Council of Higher Education approves the establishment of the new University, the institution and its programmes must be accredited according to the procedures described in Chapter Three of this document.

Where a proposal for a new University involves incorporation of one or more Colleges of Higher Education or University Colleges, the quality and resources of those institutions will be assessed. All the requirements for programmes, resources and administrative systems necessary for a University must be fully described and documented in the proposal for the new University.

In cases where existing institution(s) of Higher Education are to be incorporated into a new university, as has been suggested for some of the current institutions in Muscat, first the University should be established as a structural shell based on detailed planning for a fully functional, integrated university. Then the existing college or colleges must be upgraded to meet university standards before being merged as elements into the structure of the new university. In other words, a new university must be a new entity with the full character of a university, not simply an amalgamation of existing colleges.

viii. Changes in Level or Range of Programmes Within an Existing Classification

a) Change in Fields of Study

An institution may apply to make a major change affecting its mandate; for example, to change from a single purpose to a multi purpose institution; or, to introduce a new field of study. Approval must be obtained through an application, following the steps outlined in Chapter Three, Figure 1.0. This includes approval by the Council of Higher Education, as well as accreditation of the institution, and any new programmes, by the Accreditation Board.

b) Programme Changes for Colleges of Higher Education and University Colleges

A College of Higher Education may be approved to offer programmes in specified fields of study from level 1 to level 4 (certificate to Bachelor's degree). A University College may be approved to offer programmes in specified fields of study from level 1 to level 5 (certificate to Master's degree). It should be noted that approval is required both for the levels at which programmes may be offered and for the programmes at each level. Depending on the significance of a proposed change, approval may be required from the responsible Ministry, or from that Ministry and the Council of Higher Education.

A private Higher Education College or University College wishing to expand its mandate within the range of the category to which it belongs, or to offer programmes in a new field of study, should apply in the first instance to the Directorate-General of Private Universities and Colleges. The Directorate-General will assess the need for programmes in that field and the level of resources available.

The Directorate-General will also assess other matters it considers relevant to the capacity of the institution to offer programmes in the field and at the level proposed. Following this assessment, the proposal is then referred to the Council of Higher Education which may then grant conditional approval to operate at the higher level or in the new field. If approval is granted, the licence of the institution will be modified accordingly by the Minister of Higher Education, subject to accreditation following the steps outlined in Chapter 3, Figure 1.0.

The provisional standing of the institution regarding a new level and/or new programmes may be removed following assessment within 12 months by the Accreditation Board, or it may be extended for one or two years, or revoked.

Where a government institution wishes to extend its mandate within the range of its classification, the relevant Ministry will assess the need for additional programmes, the level of resources available and other matters it considers relevant. The Ministry concerned may then grant approval to operate at the new level, subject to accreditation by the Accreditation Board. Where a government institution wishes to offer programmes in fields that go beyond the jurisdiction of the concerned Ministry, the proposal would have to be approved by the Council of Higher Education.

c) Programme Changes for Universities

Universities may be approved to offer programmes from level 1 to level 6 (Certificate level to Doctoral degree). The approval given by the Council of Higher Education for a University to be established will specify the fields of study and the levels at which programmes can be provided. This approval is subject to accreditation. If the University wishes to increase the level of its offerings in any field beyond the levels for which approval has been given, or to extend the range of its programmes to an additional field, it must first obtain the approval of the Council of Higher Education.

An application by a Private University should be made in the first instance to the Directorate-General of Private Universities and Colleges. The Directorate-General will study the application and make a report for the Minister of Higher Education, with recommendations to be forwarded, along with the application, to the Council of Higher Education.

Universities must be granted a licence to operate by the Minister before programmes can be offered. Provisional accreditation is considered on application within the first 12 months of operation.

I X Changes in Programmes

a) Amendments to an Accredited Programme

If an institution wishes to make changes to an accredited programme, the Ministry responsible must be informed at least one semester (minimum of four months) before the change is implemented.

If the change is a major one, in addition to the prior approval of the concerned Ministry, the approval of the Accreditation Board must be obtained. Approval of the Higher Education Council may also be required. Full documentation in support of the change will be required.

A proposal to upgrade an existing programme; for example, to change a Diploma programme to a Bachelor's degree programme will require accreditation. The procedures to upgrade an existing programme are the same as for renewal of programme accreditation, including a self-study. Upgrading is not simply a matter of adding additional units at a more advanced level; the structure of the total programme should be reviewed in order to ensure coherence.

b) Major and Minor Changes

Changes involving more minor matters, such as the title of a programme or the length of a programme or the addition of new courses within an approved programme, require approval of the responsible Ministry. The Accreditation Board is to be informed through the Ministry of Higher Education.

A major change would involve the approval of the Accreditation Board in addition to the approval of the responsible Ministry. Examples of major changes would be the addition or deletion of a major area of study; eg., Marketing within a Business degree; introduction of programmes to prepare students for a different occupation or profession within an approved field; eg, the addition of cosmetic surgery within Medicine; or, a change in the name of the university or in the title of an award; eg., BSc to B Eng. The responsible Ministry is to consult the Technical Secretariat of the Accreditation Board with respect to whether a change is to be considered as major.

Having outlined in this Chapter a classification system for Oman's Institutions of Higher Education and specified the standards for different types of institutions,

we now continue the specification of standards underlying Oman's new system of Quality Assurance by setting out the requirements for a National Qualifications Framework in Chapter Two. This will be followed in Chapter Three by specification of the procedures and standards for Accreditation. Chapter Four places Oman's standards in the international context by describing International Standards of Good Practice.

PART ONE *continued*

Chapter Two

National Qualifications Framework

PART ONE: SECTION I: STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN OMAN *Cont'd*

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- c) General Competencies*

2. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL TWO: DIPLOMA

- a) Knowledge*
- b) Cognitive Skills*
- c) General Competencies*
- d) Qualities of Holders of Diplomas*

3. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL THREE: ADVANCED DIPLOMA

- a) *Knowledge*
- b) *Cognitive Skills*
- c) *General Competencies*
- d) *Qualities of Holders of Advanced Diplomas:*

4. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FOUR: BACHELOR'S DEGREE

- a) *Knowledge*
- b) *Cognitive Skills*
- c) *General Competencies*
- d) *Qualities of Holders of the Bachelor's Degree:*

OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FOUR: GRADUATE DIPLOMA

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Chapter Two: National Qualifications Framework

i) Introduction

Oman's National Qualifications Framework is a key part of the new system of Quality Assurance, as it sets the standards for academic awards for all categories of institutions as described in Chapter One.

The Qualifications Framework is designed to provide consistency in programme requirements and award titles, as well as to provide equivalence of standards in comparison with respected international institutions of Higher Education. The framework is designed specifically for the Oman context and establishes policy regarding the learning outcomes expected in Higher Education, with particular emphasis on thinking and problem solving.

The Qualifications Framework is based on the assumption that students entering Higher Education will have completed a full programme of Secondary Education and will have acquired the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in their chosen field of study in Higher Education.

In order to meet the admission requirements for Higher Education, it will be necessary for some students to complete Foundation studies.

Foundation studies are undertaken prior to admission to Higher Education programmes, and are not considered part of Higher Education programmes.

All students applying for entry to an institution of Higher Education must meet the entry requirements of that institution, including the minimum required grade point average.

Students who have completed advanced studies beyond Year 12 in Secondary School (whether or not there is a formal transfer arrangement between the new institution and the institution at which the student completed advanced studies) and can demonstrate to the receiving institution that they have completed equivalent work with required competencies should be granted Advanced Standing by the receiving institution; that is, be given credit for work previously completed that is equivalent to specific components of a Higher Education programme. It should be noted that the concept of Advanced Standing is based on the idea of Transfer Credit for a formal course of studies, NOT on Credit for Prior Learning, which could involve credit for informal self-study or for work experience.

ii) Levels of the Framework

The Qualifications Framework contains six levels of post secondary education, including four undergraduate and two postgraduate levels.

The term “Level” is used to refer to a degree of achievement in academic progress on a scale, with gradations representing the extent of acquisition of knowledge, conceptual understanding, competencies and practical skills. The scale below starts with learning outcomes expected of students in their first year of post secondary education at Level One and progresses to Level Six, which specifies the advanced scholarship expected of graduates from Doctoral programmes.

Undergraduate

Level	Credit Points	Credit Hours	Normal Minimum Time	Award Title
Level 1	120	30	1 Year	(Certificate)
Level 2	240	60	2 Years	Diploma (includes Associate Degree)
Level 3	360	90	3 Years	Advanced Diploma (includes Scottish Degree)
Level 4	480	120	4 Years	Bachelor's Degree
	120	30	1 Year at Level 4	Graduate Diploma

Postgraduate

Level	Credit Points	Credit Hours	Normal Minimum Time	Award Title
Level 5	150-180	30-45	1–2 yrs after Bachelor's	Master's Degree *
	120	30	1 Year at Level 5	Postgraduate Diploma
Level 6	300	75	2 – 4 Yrs after Master's	Doctorate

- Note: A duration of 180 credit points (45 credit hours) is the norm for the Master's Degree; however, students who have completed a bachelor's programme in the same discipline may be allowed to reduce their Master's programme to 150 credit points ((30 credit hours).

The framework utilises a credit point system (with the equivalent in credit hours shown for explanatory purposes). One credit point represents the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by an average learner at the level concerned in 10 hours of work. 120 has been selected as the number to be used for the equivalent of one year's full time academic work. Widely used in the UK and US systems, this equivalence (120 credit points = one year full time academic work) is easily divisible into semesters or quarters or individual subjects.

The emphasis on credit points rather than credit hours puts the focus appropriately on what has been learned (the outcome) rather than how long it takes (the input).

Studies at each level should lead to achievement of the knowledge and skills required for that level, and also provide the foundation for progression to the next level.

Where an intermediate exit award is granted, for example at Level 2 (Diploma) in a 4 year programme (eg., Bachelor's degree), the award should be regarded as a worthwhile qualification in its own right, and students should have useful knowledge and marketable skills on exit. The adoption of a four year undergraduate programme structure culminating in a Bachelor's degree is consistent with common practice in the region and abroad.

The Graduate Diploma normally is taken after completion of the Bachelor's degree at the same level as the Bachelors degree (Level 4), but in a different speciality or in a new field. The Postgraduate Diploma is taken *in the same field* after completion of the Bachelor's degree. Postgraduate Diploma studies are at the Masters level (Level 5), but do not involve the completion of a thesis.

iii) Generic Competencies

A brief statement of expected outcomes based on best practice internationally is included at each level of the Qualifications Framework.

These statements are generic descriptions grouped under the headings: Knowledge, Cognitive Skills, and General Competencies. These include making appropriate use of Information Technology.

The Framework does not encompass subject specific outcomes, which are to be defined by the institution for each programme.

Student assessment methods should provide evidence of achievement of both generic and subject specific programme requirements.

Outcomes should also reflect the policy priorities of Oman's system of Higher Education, including familiarity with Omani cultural traditions and reconciliation of those traditions with the need to compete effectively in the global economy.

Graduates should have the ability and commitment to engage in lifelong learning.

lv) Implementation

Institutions offering programmes that are not consistent with the Framework will be expected to achieve compliance for any new student intakes commencing after the adoption of the new Framework.

Students who are currently enrolled in a noncompliant programme should be permitted to complete the programme according to the structure in place at the time they originally enrolled in the programme

V) Overseas Universities Operating in Oman

In order to receive an academic award issued by an external partner institution, students must meet all the requirements of the external institution.

At the same time, *all* programmes offered within Oman, including those offered through external institutions, must meet the requirements specified in this document.

Where an institution in Oman offers programmes in partnership with an overseas university and the awards conferred are those of the overseas university, the award title of the overseas university may be used, provided that the overseas university's regulations for degrees do not fall below the requirements described in the Oman Qualifications Framework.

vi) Verification of Standards

It is part of the internal quality assurance responsibility of all Higher Education institutions, and a pre-requisite for accreditation to obtain independent verification that standards are consistently achieved.

Strategies used to verify standards should include specific, objective measures such as check marking of student assignments, external reviews of departments and programmes, assessment of programmes by students and graduates, and reports from employers on the skills of graduates.

vii) Outcomes

Note that all levels include subject specific learning outcomes as defined by the institution for the particular field of study.

1. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL ONE: CERTIFICATE

Studies at Level One are more advanced than studies in the final year of Secondary School. The Level One certificate is an award carrying 120 credit points (30 credit hours), following one year of full time study in Higher Education *after* completion of Secondary Education; and, if applicable, after the Foundation Year.

This award should be regarded as a worthwhile qualification in its own right, and students should have useful knowledge and marketable skills on exit.

a) Knowledge

Knowledge outcomes include familiarity with, and the ability to interpret, significant information, major issues and contemporary events in the field.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include an understanding of, and ability to apply, concepts, principles and theories in the analysis of issues and to solve uncomplicated problems.

Cognitive skills are evidenced by familiarity with the major techniques of enquiry, and the ability to gather, analyse and report on qualitative and quantitative data.

c) General Competencies

General competencies include the ability to communicate effectively, orally and in writing, both for personal communication and for formal reports.

Students should have sufficient mastery of mathematical concepts and the skills to analyse data and solve problems

2. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL TWO: DIPLOMA

The Level 2 Diploma is an award carrying 240 credit points (60 credit hours), following two years of full time study in Higher Education and may cover a

number of subject fields or focus on one or two fields of specialisation. It includes recognition of the Associate Degree designation.

Normally more than 50% of studies are in the specialised field, with additional studies in related areas, general skill development, and general education.

All programmes should facilitate general skills in thinking, problem-solving and communication, as well as knowledge and skills in the core subject areas.

a) Knowledge

Expected outcomes include knowledge of significant bodies of information in the general field as well as in some areas of specialisation.

Students' knowledge should include the scope and nature of the field of study and of the subjects within it, and of principal relationships between the field and other areas of knowledge, as well as critical understanding of well-established principles of enquiry.

Students must have an awareness of major issues within the field and how those issues might be addressed.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include an understanding of the central underlying concepts, principles and theories of the field of study, and the ability to apply them in a new context, including, where appropriate, in an employment context.

It is important that students gain awareness of the limits of their knowledge, and of how this influences interpretations based on that knowledge.

c) General Competencies

General competencies include the ability to use information and communications technology in accessing, analysing and reporting to diverse audiences on relevant information.

Students must be able to identify and initiate responses to their own learning needs and to work effectively, both independently and in groups.

d) Qualities of Holders of Diplomas:

Holders of diplomas should have the ability to use a range of established techniques to analyse information and to propose solutions to clearly defined

problems. They can draw conclusions based on valid evidence and communicate the results of their analyses accurately and reliably.

3. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL THREE: ADVANCED DIPLOMA

The Level 3 Advanced Diploma is an award carrying 360 credit points (90 credit hours) following three years of full time study.

Programmes should provide a broad understanding of the subject or discipline field as a whole and provide more advanced work in at least one area of specialisation, perhaps with a vocational focus.

Students should understand, and be able to apply to new situations, the concepts and principles that provide the theoretical underpinning of knowledge in their field.

a) Knowledge

Knowledge outcomes include mastery of the significant bodies of information within a given field, and in-depth understanding of the major specialisations, including awareness of key issues, and of how to address them.

Students must understand the way in which new knowledge is developed and should be aware of significant relationships between their field of study and related areas of knowledge.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include the understanding of, and ability to apply, key concepts and principles in interpreting information and addressing issues in, and outside, the original learning context. They should have a critical understanding of the principal methods of investigation and how to apply them to new problems.

Students should have an awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge and an ability to take this into account in the interpretation, analysis and resolution of problems.

c) General Competencies

Students should have the ability to communicate information effectively, to develop arguments and analyse data in a variety of forms appropriate to different issues and audiences. The ability to make effective use of information technology is critical.

Students should have leadership capability and teamwork skills.

d) Qualities of Holders of Advanced Diplomas:

Graduates should have the ability to take initiative in identifying problems requiring resolution and to take appropriate remedial action.

They should be able to undertake further training on their own initiative in order to develop new skills and remain up to date with developments in the field.

4. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FOUR: BACHELOR'S DEGREE

The Bachelor's degree is an award carrying 480 credit points (120 credit hours) following four years of full time study or equivalent.

The Bachelor's degree programme should provide a balance of breadth and depth, with at least one, and preferably two, main subjects or disciplines taken to completion at Level 4, along with lower level studies broadly related to the field of study.

Some programmes may have a vocational focus intended to qualify graduates to practice in a profession.

Graduates are able to communicate effectively orally and in writing.

Graduates should understand the culture and traditions of Oman in general and in relation to their academic studies.

a) Knowledge

Knowledge outcomes include comprehensive understanding of the field of study as a whole, including links to related knowledge in other disciplines and professional areas.

Graduates should have general familiarity with the latest developments at the forefront of the field and detailed knowledge of at least one significant area.

Knowledge outcomes include an understanding of the provisional nature of knowledge and of the way in which new knowledge is developed and applied in the analysis and resolution of problems.

Where studies involve professional preparation, graduates should have knowledge of relevant Omani laws, regulations and conventions. They should also understand in general the similarities and differences between Omani requirements and those in effect in appropriate jurisdictions abroad.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include the ability to apply established concepts, theories and modes of enquiry in a given discipline or professional field, in synthesizing and interpreting information and evaluating possible conclusions.

Cognitive skills involve the ability to analyse problems independently, drawing on conceptual skills, while taking into account the provisional nature of knowledge. Graduates should have the ability to devise solutions to complex problems and to communicate and explain findings effectively.

c) General Competencies

Students must acquire the ability systematically to gather, analyse and interpret relevant qualitative and quantitative data from a range of sources, including original sources, and scholarly or professional literature.

Graduates should have the ability to communicate effectively and to develop persuasive arguments, using different modes of communication in the language of instruction.

It is critical that graduates have the routine ability to use the most appropriate communications technology in gathering, interpreting and communicating information.

d) Qualities of Holders of the Bachelor's Degree:

Holders of the Bachelor's degree should be able to take responsibility for managing their own learning and should be able to keep up to date with new developments in their fields.

They should be able to make sound judgments about complex issues, drawing on the knowledge and skills developed in their programmes, and to communicate conclusions effectively.

They should be able to take initiative in the analysis and resolution of problems in ways that demonstrate creativity in formulating problems, evaluating evidence, and developing persuasive arguments and sound solutions.

OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FOUR: GRADUATE DIPLOMA

The Graduate Diploma is an award for studies of one academic year and includes 120 credit points (30 credit hours), after completion of a Bachelor's

degree or an Advanced Diploma. The award is intended for graduates who wish to undertake additional work to ensure familiarity with the latest developments in their field or to extend their studies to a different area.

The outcomes expected are comparable to those of graduates from the Bachelor's degree programme.

5. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FIVE: MASTER'S DEGREE

The Master's degree is an award carrying a minimum of 180 credit points, (45 credit hours) normally following at least one year, and up to three years, of advanced study. The prerequisite is completion of a Bachelor's degree in a related field.

Work at this level requires familiarity with the latest advances in knowledge in a given field; advanced skills in independent enquiry; and the capacity to apply knowledge effectively in new and unpredictable situations. A Master's programme may involve undertaking a dissertation or major supervised research investigation; or, it may involve a combination of coursework and a major project. The Master's research project must involve the application of knowledge to a matter of significance.

The Masters degree may be primarily research oriented or may involve substantial coursework, as well as the completion of a major project.

a) Knowledge

Expected knowledge outcomes include acquisition of a substantial body of knowledge, including critical awareness of current problems, theories and developments.

Graduates are expected also to have acquired knowledge of the outcomes of recent research and to understand its impact on the store of established knowledge. Graduates should be aware of new issues emerging as a result of discoveries in recent research.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include the ability to evaluate critically recent research, assess its validity, reliability and significance; and, where relevant, the ability to propose alternative interpretations and directions for further research.

It is important that cognitive skills include the ability to apply relevant concepts, principles and research techniques to new issues and problems in creative ways.

c) General Competencies

General competencies include the ability to use a range of research and problem solving techniques. Graduates should have knowledge of how research techniques are best used and of how to adapt research techniques to create, interpret and apply new knowledge.

General competencies also encompass the ability to develop comprehensive reports and concise public communications, as well as to report effectively on complex interpretations and make recommendations.

Graduates should have the ability to lead teams to effectively address and resolve complex and/or controversial issues.

d) Qualities of Holders of Masters Degrees:

Holders of Master's degrees should have the ability to act independently and creatively in analysing problems. They should be able to apply their knowledge and skills in the investigation of problems and development of solutions.

Holders of Master's degrees should have the ability to make sound judgments on complex issues and communicate their conclusions effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Successful graduates accept responsibility for their own learning and future professional development. They are characterised by commitment and the ability to work in cooperation with others in identifying issues and resolving problems.

POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA: LEVEL FIVE

The Postgraduate Diploma is an award for studies of one academic year with 120 credit points (30 credit hours). The prerequisite for admission is the completion of a Bachelor's degree. This programme is for graduates wishing to update or broaden their academic background, or to convert their area of expertise to a different field.

Postgraduate Diploma programmes normally do not include a dissertation requirement (in contrast to the Master's degree), but may include a major or minor project.

The outcomes expected are comparable to those for a Master's degree, except for the demonstrated capacity to carry out and report on a major research project.

6. OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL SIX: DOCTORATE

The Doctoral Degree is an award carrying at least 300 credit points (75 credit hours) for a programme of advanced studies. The Doctoral degree is normally taken over at least two years and up to four years, following completion of a Master's degree.

Doctoral programmes require advanced independent scholarship involving the creation, interpretation and application of new knowledge, as well as understanding of the most recent developments in a major field of enquiry. Advanced research skills and comprehensive reporting skills are critical.

A doctoral programme may be based on a major research project, or a combination of advanced coursework and thesis.

The award granted for a research degree is normally a PhD. The term PhD is not used for programmes in professional fields. Professional doctoral degree programmes include a substantial coursework component and the award title usually includes reference to the professional field involved. Examples are: DEng, (Engineering) DBus (Business), DBA, (Business Administration, and EdD (Education).

a) Knowledge

Knowledge outcomes include acquisition of a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of a given field, as well as its relationship to relevant other fields.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include the ability to identify a problem, the resolution of which will result in new knowledge or a significant development in professional practice. Doctoral students must be able to analyse the various dimensions of a problem through the application of relevant theories, principles and concepts. They must be able to design and carry out an investigation of the problem at a level of performance which satisfies experienced practitioners in the field.

c) General Competencies

General competencies include the ability to apply relevant research techniques to significant new developments; and, where necessary, to refine and extend existing research techniques.

Doctoral students must develop the ability to communicate results and explain the significance of original research or of advanced scholarship, so that the product is of sufficient quality for publication in a reputable journal.

d) Qualities of Holders of Doctoral Degrees:

The Doctoral graduate should have the skills and ability to undertake original research at an advanced level, independently and as a member of a team. Research should contribute significantly to the development of new knowledge, techniques or professional practice.

The graduate should be able to make informed judgments on complex issues requiring application of concepts and insights from their own field and related fields. They must be able to communicate conclusions effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Successful graduates of Doctoral programmes accept responsibility for their own learning and professional development. They are characterised by commitment and the ability to work in cooperation with others in resolving problems of mutual interest.

Having set out the standards for academic awards in the context of a National Qualifications Framework in this chapter, we now complete this section of PART ONE on standards with Chapter Three on the procedures for approval and accreditation of Institutions of Higher Education. The second section on standards, Chapter Four, contains a description of best international practices to be applied to the Oman context.

PART ONE *continued*

Chapter Three

Procedures for Approval & Accreditation

PART ONE: SECTION I: STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN OMAN *Cont'd*

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Chapter Three: Procedures for Approval & Accreditation

i. Introduction:

This Chapter provides an overview of the processes for approval and accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

Procedures are based on previous ordinances and regulations established by Royal Decrees, but modified to provide for the role of the Accreditation Board. The material in this chapter is an elaboration of a proposal put to the Higher Education Council in 2001. This resulted in the issuance of Royal Decree 74/2001, establishing the Accreditation Board.

The roles of the main government agencies in the accreditation process are described in this document and the stages of approval and accreditation are explained in detail. The accreditation and approval process is summarised in flow chart form in *Figure 1.0*.

Individual higher education institutions are expected to establish rigorous procedures to ensure that quality is maintained and improved, in comparison with standards of quality in recognised institutions in Oman and abroad.

An institution must be accredited provisionally within the first 12 months of operation. Confirmed and continuing accreditation of both institutions and programmes is conditional on positive reports from external quality audits, to be undertaken once every five years. Before the external audit, institutions are required to undertake an internal self-review of their performance. The self study report will be examined carefully by the external review panels.

The Accreditation Board will maintain a database with information on the results of their activities in ensuring quality in the system of Higher Education and an annual report will be published to guide institutions and the government in planning and development activities.

ii. Agencies Involved in the Accreditation Process

- a) **The Council of Higher Education** has responsibility for public policy on Higher Education. As part of this responsibility, the Council determines the number and location of institutions, and approves proposals for the establishment of new institutions, as well as changes in the classification of existing institutions. These approvals are subject to accreditation of the institutions and their programmes.

- b) **The Accreditation Board** accredits higher education institutions to offer programmes at specified levels; and, similarly, accredits individual programmes. The Accreditation Board thereby certifies that all institutions and programmes in Oman's system of Higher Education meet required standards.

If approved standards are not maintained, the Accreditation Board may withdraw accreditation or decline to renew the accreditation for a programme. However the Accreditation Board does not investigate complaints or impose penalties for inadequate performance; rather, the Ministry with administrative responsibility for the institution concerned would undertake any necessary investigative or punitive action.

- c) Under the direction of the relevant Minister, **Ministries** may, with the approval of the Council of Higher Education, and subject to accreditation by the Accreditation Board, establish higher education institutions to offer programmes in an approved field of activity. Such institutions are responsible administratively to their Ministries, but the Accreditation Board monitors the quality of their performance through institutional quality audits and through the process for renewal of programme accreditation.
- d) **The Directorate-General of Private Universities and Colleges** in the Ministry of Higher Education has responsibility for the supervision and accountability of all private Higher Education institutions in the Sultanate. In addition, the Directorate provides the technical secretariat for the Accreditation Board. The Accreditation Board monitors the quality of the performance of private institutions and of their programmes according to the same procedures used for government institutions.

e) **Relationship Between Ministry and Institution**

Higher education institutions have been established and/or are regulated by different Ministries, including mainly: the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Manpower, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. For implementation of the new arrangements, it is anticipated that each Ministry will work with the institutions for which it has responsibility.

While the Accreditation Board will focus particularly on activities at the institutional level, the Board will take interest in, and may make comments on, the regulations and activities of the Ministry concerned, insofar as they affect the quality of Higher Education.

iii. Stages in Approval and Accreditation of Institutions and Programmes

The approval for new higher education institutions to operate in the Sultanate of Oman involves four stages.

- a) **The First Stage: Proposal:** The first stage includes the development of a comprehensive proposal and feasibility study. The proposal may be submitted by a government ministry for a government institution, or by a private person or group for a private institution. The proposal for a private institution should be made to the Directorate-General of Private Universities and Colleges, where it will be studied and a report prepared for the Council of Higher Education.

Before a proposal for a new government institution is submitted to the Directorate-General of Private Universities and Colleges, the requesting Ministry should consult the Ministry of Higher Education for guidance. In the case of both government and private proposals, the report to the Council of Higher Education will include comment on conformance with regulations; quality of academic provision, learning and support resources; and, financial viability. Attention is paid particularly to the need for the new institution, including potential impact on other provision.

- b) **The Second Stage: Conditional Approval and Licensing:** The second stage involves conditional approval or rejection by the Council of Higher Education. If approval by the Council of Higher Education is granted, the Minister of Higher Education grants the institution a license to commence operations for a period of 12 months after completion of facilities and full mobilisation of all required resources. This is followed in the third stage by supervision by the Ministry of Higher Education in the case of private institutions, and by the relevant Ministry in the case of public institutions.
- c) **The Third Stage: Provisional Accreditation and Renewal of License:** The third stage occurs during the first year of operation and involves application to the Accreditation Board for provisional accreditation of both the institution and its programmes. A self evaluation with a full report and external audit are required and must be provided within a maximum of 12 months after commencement of operations. The results of the self study and external audit are evaluated by the Accreditation Board, with advice from special panels appointed by the Board.

If provisional accreditation is granted on the basis of the performance of the institution during its first year of operation and its plans for the next four years, official notification is given to the Minister for Higher Education who then renews the license, enabling the institution to continue operating for another four years. During this time, the institution is monitored by the

Accreditation Board in order to ensure that commitments have been met and programmes are delivered as proposed.

- d) **The Fourth Stage: Full Accreditation:** The fourth stage involves full accreditation and occurs before the end of the first five year period of operation. If the Accreditation Board is satisfied as a result of the second self study and external review that commitments have been met and quality is being maintained as proposed, the provisional designation is removed, and the institution is considered to be fully accredited.

(insert Figure 1.0 "Process of Accreditation")

iv. Application of Accreditation Regulations to Existing Institutions

a) General Considerations

Institutions which are in operation as of the effective date of the new regulations are deemed to have approval to operate under their existing classification, subject to accreditation within 12 months. Licenses will be issued for existing, approved institutions to continue to operate, subject to subsequent review and accreditation.

The new regulations regarding classification of institutions involve changes to the requirements for University College status. Where an existing University College falls short of the new requirements, an opportunity will be given to the governing board of the University College to make the changes necessary to meet fully the new requirements for University College status. If the governing board declines the opportunity, the institution, by a decision of the Council of Higher Education on the recommendation of the Accreditation Board, will revert to College of Higher Education status.

Existing approved institutions are given a period of one year to develop a quality improvement plan and to complete a full institutional and programme self study and to submit a report to the Accreditation Board. If the assessment of the Accreditation Board is satisfactory, accreditation is granted. If the Accreditation Board is not satisfied, the relevant license(s) may be revoked or an extension of time may be given for deficiencies to be remedied.

b) Accreditation of a New Programme

Institutions approved by the Council of Higher Education to offer programmes in given fields of study may apply for accreditation of new programmes within their jurisdiction.

Before a new programme can be accredited, the Accreditation Board must be confident that the intended outcomes will be achieved. Representatives of the institution should begin by meeting with staff of the Technical Secretariat to discuss requirements for accreditation.

A detailed application should be prepared, with information provided as specified in the *Guide for Programme Accreditation* included in PART TWO of this document. The information required includes a description of: student outcomes; how student outcomes are to be achieved and evaluated; how course will be kept current; and how quality will be monitored and improved. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide convincing evidence that the necessary standards and requirements will be met.

Advice on the application may be provided by the staff of the Technical Secretariat. However any advice given by the Technical secretariat will be without prejudice to the opinions of the review panel, or to subsequent decisions by the Accreditation Board.

The application should be submitted to the Technical Secretariat of the Accreditation Board at least 9 months before the new programme is scheduled to commence. The application will be checked by the Technical Secretariat. If the application is deficient in any way, it will be returned for amendment.

c) Premature Commencement

Making representations to the public or to potential students that institutional or programme approval or accreditation has been granted before the fact, or commencing operations or implementing changes before the necessary licenses have been granted, will be regarded as serious offences and appropriate penalties will be imposed.

v. Self-Study

a) Institutional Responsibility

The primary responsibility for ensuring the maintenance and improvement of an institution and its programmes rests with the institution. Judgments about approval and accreditation are based partly on whether the institution is deemed to have the capacity to exercise independent responsibility.

It should be noted that there are specific requirements for Quality Assurance as well as for procedures in external verification. Details of the requirements for self study and reporting are described in the *Procedural Guides* in PART TWO of this document.

b) Internal Quality Systems

Institutions are expected, on a continuing basis, to assess the current level of their performance, including the quality of programmes. They are expected to develop Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) which reflect their mission, priorities, local and national needs. Institutions must define performance indicators, set benchmarks and monitor performance accordingly. All institutions are expected to document procedures, record outcomes and report internally on the effectiveness of Quality Assurance systems. These activities will serve to prepare institutions to meet the requirements of the periodic *formal* self studies which are to include official reports on quality of performance.

Though self study reports are primarily for use by institutions in strategic planning and quality improvement processes, they also serve as a basis for external verification of institutional quality.

c) Quality Improvement Plans

Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) should be developed for all major areas of activity. The QIP should include a summary plan for the institution as a whole. Quality Improvement Plans are to be submitted to the relevant Ministry and the Accreditation Board. The QIP for a given institution must reflect its mission and objectives, specifying performance indicators and benchmarks.

d) Involvement of other Organisations in Verifying Standards

Institutions of Higher Education are encouraged to involve other higher education institutions, members of professions, and employers in their internal assessments. A wide range of strategies should be adopted for support and for independent evaluation of standards and activities. These strategies may include, where appropriate, academic partnerships with other institutions, or joint activities with other institutions or cooperative arrangements with a Directorate or Ministry. The Accreditation Board regards such strategies involving external organisations as part of the institution's internal quality assurance system.

vi. External Review of Institutions

Institutional reviews are conducted normally every five years by External Review Panels appointed by the Accreditation Board. The panels, composed of representatives from Oman and abroad, will examine the institution's self-study report, meet with staff and students, and conduct an intensive review of activities before preparing a report which will be made available to the institution, the Accreditation Board and the concerned Ministry.

The main purpose of the external review process is to verify that the quality of the institution is maintained and improved, and to identify any areas where improvement is required or desirable. If significant weaknesses are identified, an opportunity may be given for the institution to address problems before the next external assessment takes place. The granting of such an opportunity will be at the discretion of the Accreditation Board. If the problems identified are not resolved, the institution's accreditation may be revoked and students relocated at the expense of the institution.

vii. Renewal of Accreditation for Programmes

Programmes are normally accredited for a period of five years, by which time accreditation must be renewed. The process of monitoring and reviewing programmes is similar to that used for the institution as a whole.

When a new programme is to be considered for accreditation, a proposal must be submitted to the technical secretariat with details of how programme quality is to be monitored, specifying performance indicators and benchmarks. The proposed procedures must be followed and records kept of performance as well as of action taken in response to feedback received in evaluations.

In preparation for renewal of accreditation a formal programme evaluation is carried out internally and a report prepared. This report is submitted to the Accreditation Board, which will appoint an external review panel to assess the programme and to advise on whether accreditation should be renewed. This panel will include experienced academic staff from other institutions. In the case of programmes that prepare students for professional employment, the panel will include representatives of the professions concerned and/or of industry as appropriate.

The Accreditation Board will coordinate the timing and administration of institutional quality audits in consultation with relevant Higher Education institutions.

Having described the internal standards for Oman's new system of Quality Assurance, next, in Chapter Four we complete the discussion of standards by placing Oman's standards in the context of best practice internationally.

PART ONE: SECTION II

Chapter Four

Standards of Good Practice

PART ONE: SECTION I: STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN OMAN *Cont'd*

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Chapter Four: Standards of Good Practice in Higher Education Institutions

a) Introduction

This chapter describes what is generally considered good practice in quality assurance in Higher Education internationally and includes suggested quality indicators and performance measures.

Sample performance indicators are described and institutions are expected to suggest benchmarks that they believe to be appropriate to their mission and circumstances. Ministries may propose performance indicators and benchmarks for the institutions for which they are responsible. All institutions will be expected to implement indicators and benchmarks that provide evidence of performance at levels comparable to recognised international institutions. The effectiveness of the indicators and benchmarks selected by an institution will be assessed in the initial external review.

Some performance indicators will not be optional, but required by the Accreditation Board and used consistently across the system. Examples of system-wide required indicators might include, for instance, programme effectiveness ratings by graduates; job placement rates; ratings of graduates by employers; degree of faculty involvement in scholarly activity, and performance of graduates in further study.

The standards of good practice reflect current international standards appropriately customised for Oman. For instance, the learning resources standards include reference to inter library loan systems, the development of which is essential in Oman with its system of small, geographically separated institutions.

Some staff in Oman's institutions of Higher Education may require special professional development to shift from an emphasis on memorisation towards creative thinking. Development of the capacity for independent inquiry and creative thinking is imperative. The main responsibility for professional development should rest with the institution as part of its quality assurance system, rather than with a partner institution or the concerned Ministry.

The indicators selected by the Accreditation Board will function both as a standard point of comparison among institutions, and as a source of data on the effectiveness of the Higher Education system as a whole. An important task for the permanent committees of the Accreditation Board (supported by the Technical Secretariat) will be to select a set of indicators that reflect national needs or system-wide priorities to be used in establishing benchmarks for Oman's system of Higher Education.

As data on the performance of institutions and of the Oman system of Higher Education become available, the Accreditation Board will identify a set of key performance indicators on which information will be required regularly. Common benchmarks may then be established for groups of similar institutions

b) Description of Standards

This description of standards for accreditation is intended to provide guidance to higher education institutions in quality assurance activities, including planning, self review, and quality improvement. This section is designed also to assist external panels in carrying out independent reviews of institutional performance.

The proposed quality indicators are given in broad terms and are meant to be illustrative, rather than specific prescribed requirements. Institutions should identify the specific indicators that are appropriate for their particular mission and objectives. It is important that each institution identify performance benchmarks that are both challenging and appropriate to the unique circumstances of that institution.

In assessing standards for the purpose of accreditation, reliance is placed on the advice of experienced professionals in the field of Accreditation, taking into account the mission and objectives of the institution.

Standards relate to facilities and resources, as well as to institution-wide procedures, including procedures used in the development and review of programmes. Student outcomes are assessed in the process of programme accreditation, which includes assessment of compliance with the Qualifications Framework. Where applicable, the knowledge and skill requirements for professional practice are also taken into account in assessing student outcomes.

i. Mission, Goals and Objectives

The institution should have a succinct Mission Statement which encapsulates its purpose in principal policy objectives. The Mission Statement is used as a guide for detailed planning designed to implement the Mission Statement and ensure its effectiveness. The concept of institutional effectiveness should be central to all operations and activities of an institution.

The Governing Board is responsible for approving the Mission Statement and for ensuring that it is kept up to date and adapted effectively in changing times. The Governing Board should take great care in the execution of this central duty.

The Mission Statement should be used to establish strategic priorities for effective institutional development and improvement. Setting priorities is a key element in the quality assurance process. The Mission Statement should be the fundamental touchstone in all activities related to planning, evaluation and resource allocation. The Mission must be consistent with the mandate of the institution, and realistic in relation to the capacity of the institution to operate in its particular economic and demographic environment. It must be powerful enough to generate a sense of ownership across the institution. At the same time, the Mission Statement should present challenges for the effective development of the institution while encouraging continuous improvement.

Institutional goals are derived from the Mission. Goals are used to establish general directions for overall institutional planning as well as for departmental planning.

Objectives are derived from institutional goals and are operationalised through the strategic planning process. Objectives are much more specific than goals, which in turn are more specific than the Mission from which both goals and objectives are derived. Wherever possible, objectives should include target levels of performance to be achieved within a stated time period.

Standards related to the Mission are used to evaluate the way the Mission Statement has been developed and is expressed through goals and objectives. Performance measures are used to gauge the effectiveness of the Mission, goals and objectives in guiding all activities of the institution, particularly the development and improvement of the institution and its programmes.

1. Good Practice in Establishing Mission, Goals and Objectives

1.1 Appropriateness of the Mission

- 1.1.1 The Mission Statement is consistent with the charter of the institution and with the expectations for an institution of its type.
- 1.1.2 The needs of the communities served by the institution are clearly reflected in the Mission.
- 1.1.3 The Mission Statement is accompanied by a thorough analysis of the relevant environment or catchment areas. The mission is linked clearly to the environment by a rationale justifying the relevance of the mission.

1.2 Mission Statement Quality

- 1.2.1 The Mission Statement is sufficiently specific to provide an effective guide in making choices among alternative development strategies.
- 1.2.2 The Mission Statement is broad enough to be relevant in application to the key activities of an institution.
- 1.2.3 The core values of the institution are clearly reflected in the Mission Statement.
- 1.2.4 The Mission Statement describes accurately and truthfully the institution and its characteristics. It reflects accurately and consistently the actual posture of the institution and its practices.

1.3 Development of the Mission Statement

- 1.3.1 Major stakeholders within the institution and the community have been consulted and found to support the Mission.
- 1.3.2 The governing body of the institution formally approves the Mission Statement.
- 1.3.3 Reviews are conducted periodically to confirm or amend the Mission in the light of changing circumstances.

1.4 Use of the Mission Statement

- 1.4.1 Goals and objectives for development across the institution are clearly derived from the Mission Statement.
- 1.4.2 The Mission Statement is accurately described in publications; and is known to, and supported by, staff and students.
- 1.4.3 The Mission Statement is used consistently as a basis for decision making in strategic planning for the institution as a whole and for each major administrative unit.
- 1.4.4 Decisions on resource allocation within the institution clearly reflect the Mission.
- 1.4.5 Consistency with the Mission is listed among the criteria for approval of all programme and project proposals.

1.5 Goals

- 1.5.1 Goals for all major areas of institutional activity are clearly related to the mission.
- 1.5.2 Goals are stated with sufficient clarity to guide planning and decision making effectively.
- 1.5.3 Each administrative area reviews and modifies its goals regularly in the light of changing circumstances.

1.6 Objectives

- 1.6.1 Objectives are expressed in specific terms which include appropriate performance indicators, and identifies target levels to be achieved within specified time periods.
- 1.6.2 Demanding, but achievable, objectives are established by each administrative unit.
- 1.6.3 Objectives are consistent with the Mission and clearly linked to it through the strategic planning process.
- 1.6.4 A consistent format is used for specification of objectives for all administrative units.

Indicators of the effectiveness of the Mission Statement include:

- Key stakeholders perceive the relevance and significance of the Mission and Goals of the institution
- Ratings by the governing body and key decision makers confirming the usefulness of the Mission Statement are used as a guide in decision making
- Staff and students are aware of and support the Mission
- Significant policy decisions are determined by valid reference to the Mission
- Criteria specified for assessment of programme proposals include consistency with the Mission

Proposed Benchmarks *(To be suggested by the institution)*

ii. Governance and Administration

Systems for governance and administration should be clearly defined and appropriate to the mission of the institution. In addition, governance and administrative systems should be regularly evaluated and improved.

While variations in institutional arrangements are appropriate, a number of principles of effective administration apply in all instances. The roles of the governing body, the chief executive officer and the senior academic committees should be clearly differentiated and defined in the regulations and administrative procedures of the institution.

The governing body should be responsible for determining key policies and strategic directions. The governing body is responsible for major decisions including approval of the institution's budget and appointment of the chief executive officer and senior staff. The governing body establishes accountability frameworks and monitors the performance of the institution. The chief executive officer is held accountable for keeping the governing body informed of major issues, though the governing body should not interfere with academic judgments or management decisions.

Mechanisms for effective coordination of planning should be in place. Goals and objectives consistent with the Mission and with the overall institutional goals and objectives should be established by all administrative departments. Mechanisms for Quality Assurance should be integral to the planning process. A senior member of staff should be assigned the responsibility for Quality Assurance.

2. Good Practice in Governance and Administration

2.1 Governing Body

- 2.1.1 The governing body has as its primary objective the effective development of the institution in the interests of students and the nation.
- 2.1.2 Membership of the governing body ensures an appropriate balance of individuals with the range of perspectives and expertise necessary to guide the policies of the institution. (In the case of a private institution, not more than one third of the members should be investors in the institution.)
- 2.1.3 Members of the governing body are familiar with the institution's range of operations. New members are given a thorough orientation and induction.

- 2.1.4 The governing body periodically reviews the mission, goals and objectives of the institution, and ensures that the mission, goals and objectives are reflected in detailed planning and institutional activities.
- 2.1.5 Sub committees of the governing body include members of senior staff, and outside persons as appropriate. Sub committees are established to consider and provide advice *at the policy level* on major matters such as finance and budget; staffing policies and remuneration; strategic planning; and facilities.
- 2.1.6 The governing body establishes appropriate mechanisms for the accountability and performance evaluation of the chief executive officer.
- 2.1.7 Regulations provide for declaration of pecuniary interest as well as a mechanism for avoidance of conflict of interest in relation to particular issues and proposals.
- 2.1.8 The governing body monitors and accepts responsibility for the total operations of the institution, but avoids interference in management decisions or with the judgments of internal academic bodies.
- 2.1.9 The governing body regularly reviews its own effectiveness in governing the institution, directs an assessment of the effectiveness of the management of the institution, commissions a report, and plans for improvement.

2.2 Chief Executive Officer

- 2.2.1 The Chief Executive Officer provides effective leadership for the institution, identifying issues and developing solutions for direct implementation or for recommendation to the governing body, as appropriate.
- 2.2.2 The Chief Executive Officer delegates administrative responsibilities within a clearly defined structure, including an appropriate reporting and accountability framework.
- 2.2.3 There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability, with regular performance evaluation and feedback.
- 2.2.4 The Chief Executive Officer provides opportunities for initiative in the exercise of responsibilities by subordinates. Advice and support are made available to subordinates in a manner which contributes to their development.

- 2.2.5 The Chief Executive Officer ensures that submissions to the governing body for approval of academic and administrative matters are fully documented and that recommendations on policy issues are presented in a form that clearly identifies policy issues for decision and the consequences of alternatives.

2.3 Internal Regulations

- 2.3.1 Regulations are communicated clearly and are accessible to all affected.
- 2.3.2 Internal regulations clearly establish responsibilities and operating procedures; and, where appropriate, the criteria for decisions for major committees, administrative units and positions within the institution
- 2.3.3 The institution has a programme for the periodic review and amendment of regulations with specified timelines.
- 2.3.4 Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the performance of each unit or major committee are established by regulations.
- 2.3.5 Regulations are in place to establish a framework for formal delegation of responsibility and mechanisms for reporting and accountability.

2.4 Quality Assurance and Improvement

- 2.4.1 The quality assurance and improvement strategy involves all parts of the institution, is led by a senior staff member as a major responsibility, and includes staff from all areas.
- 2.4.2 The institution's quality assurance system is fully integrated into the normal planning and development strategies in a defined cycle of planning, implementation, assessment and review.
- 2.4.3 All administrative units and sections within the institution, including the governing body, are included in the process of quality assurance and improvement.
- 2.4.4 Procedures involve continual monitoring of achievement of objectives as well as periodic self evaluation with results reported.
- 2.4.5 Each administrative unit establishes appropriate and challenging objectives which reflect the mission and are linked to specific performance indicators.

- 2.4.6 Performance evaluation includes comparisons with comparable institutions selected to provide appropriate benchmarks for significant activities.
- 2.4.7 The self review process incorporates feedback from individuals external to the institution in a planned programme of reviews.

2.5 Associated Companies

Where institutions establish or control subsidiary corporations for matters such as service provision, publication, or development of intellectual property there is:

- 2.5.1 Consistency between the functions of the entity and the charter and mission of the institution.
- 2.5.2 Clear specification of the responsibilities and relationship of those entities to the institution.
- 2.5.3 Effective oversight or the purposes, functions, and activities of the subsidiary by the governing body.
- 2.5.4 Provision of audited financial reports and detailed consideration of those reports by the relevant committee of the governing body.
- 2.5.5 Protection for the institution against financial or legal liabilities arising from the activities of the entity.

2.6 Institutional Research

- 2.6.1 Institutional research is developed as an effective function in collecting and analysing data and disseminating results important for the effective operation of the institution
- 2.6.2 Institutional research is incorporated as an integral part of the institution's planning and evaluation process
- 2.6.3 Administrative responsibility is assigned for conducting institutional research
- 2.6.4 Adequate resources are allocated to allow access to relevant information
- 2.6.5 Institutional research includes: ongoing timely collection, analysis and dissemination of data; use of external studies and reports; design and implementation of internal studies related to students, personnel, facilities,

equipment, programmes, services and fiscal resources; development of databases suitable for longitudinal studies and statistical analysis

Indicators for Standards of Good Practice in Governance & Administration

- Number of incidents of attempted Board interference in the management of the institution
- Smooth functioning of Board committees as indicated in informal surveys
- Morale of senior administrators and managers as measured in confidential surveys
- Turnover rate for Administrative staff
- Performance Appraisal is supported by effective professional development programmes as indicated in administrative staff feedback re professional development opportunities
- Annual audited reports indicate a balanced budget, preferably with 1% contingency reserves, and evidence of proper internal financial procedures, and proper controls over associated companies
- Quality and effectiveness of Institutional Research
- Number of Health, Safety and Environment incidents as recorded in monthly reports

Proposed Benchmarks *(to be suggested by the institution)*

iii. Learning and Teaching

Learning should be at the heart of an educational institution.

Insofar as possible, attention should be focused on the quality of learning outcomes, with other functions assessed according to the extent to which they contribute (or are likely to contribute) to those outcomes.

It is important for an institution to define carefully the special characteristics which graduates are expected to exhibit; to plan and implement strategies to develop those characteristics; and, to assess critically the extent to which competencies are developed. The focus on student outcomes has significant implications for teaching strategies, as well as for assessment. The characteristics identified by institutions for student outcomes should be

consistent with the Qualifications Framework which gives priority to the application of conceptual skills in creative thinking and problem solving; communicating effectively; and, commitment to lifelong learning.

This standard relates principally to the quality of learning and teaching. It covers instructional support activities, including assistance for students, procedures for development and review of programmes, as well as for evaluation and improvement of teaching. Attention is paid to the role of partner institutions in quality assurance, and to distance education.

An academic partnership arrangement may contribute significantly to the quality of learning and teaching, but this is not sufficient as a guarantee of quality. The focus is on the quality of learning services and resources available directly to students in Oman.

3. Good Practice in Teaching and Learning

3.1 Student Outcomes

- 3.1.1 The focus on Student Outcomes is consistent with the Qualifications Framework and with requirements for professional practice in Oman.
- 3.1.2 Special attributes that students should acquire before graduating are clearly defined; strategies for developing these attributes are implemented across all programmes, and mechanisms for assessing and reporting on achievement are in place.
- 3.1.3 Procedures have been established for benchmarking quality of learning in comparison with standards at comparable institutions.
- 3.1.4 Performance of graduates continuing in Higher Education is monitored.
- 3.1.5 Employers of graduates are surveyed regularly to gauge the relevance and adequacy of skills of graduates.

3.2 Support for Student Learning

- 3.2.1 Teaching staff are available at scheduled times for consultation and advice to students.
- 3.2.2 Sufficient tutorial assistance is provided to ensure understanding and ability to apply learning.
- 3.2.3 Systems are in place for monitoring and coordinating student workload.

- 3.2.4 The progress of individual students is monitored; and, assistance and/or counselling is provided to those facing difficulties.
- 3.2.5 Year to year progression and completion rates are monitored for the institution as a whole, for different programmes, and for particular categories of students. Progression rates are assessed with reference to appropriate benchmarks and action taken when problems are identified.
- 3.2.6 Feedback on performance and results of assessment are given promptly; and, if required, accompanied by mechanisms for assistance.

3.3 Quality of Teaching

- 3.3.1 Teaching staff are familiar with the academic administrative systems in use at the institution.
- 3.3.2 Teaching staff have qualifications and experience appropriate to their assignments
- 3.3.3 A comprehensive system for evaluation of teaching effectiveness is in place. Teaching staff develop strategies for improvement of course content and delivery methods. They maintain a portfolio of evidence regarding evaluations, noting strategies for improvement.
- 3.3.4 Incentives and rewards are given for outstanding teaching, to encourage innovation and creativity, as well as improvement.
- 3.3.5 Support and advice are provided for staff to improve teaching through procedures which include induction programmes for new staff; mentoring; supervision and appraisal; and opportunities for professional development.
- 3.3.6 There is an appropriate mix of full time and part time staff according to the needs of different programmes - sufficient to ensure continuity, staffing flexibility, availability of advice to students, and professional relevance of course material.
- 3.3.7 Teaching is up-to-date and reflects the latest developments in the field, including an understanding of how knowledge is developed and of the tentative nature of knowledge.
- 3.3.8 Course descriptions are available before courses commence and clearly specify the knowledge and skills to be developed, as well as work requirements and assessment procedures. The conduct of courses is consistent with course descriptions.

- 3.3.9 Methods of teaching are designed to develop specific student attributes and skills, rather than simply to transmit information. Teaching methods are reviewed regularly in light of their effectiveness in producing the required outcomes.
- 3.3.10 Assessment practices are clearly communicated to students at the commencement of courses. Evaluation methods cover all the objectives of the course and adequately assess the required outcomes.

3.4 Programme Development and Review

- 3.4.1 New course proposals are formally assessed and approved or rejected by the Academic Board or equivalent committee.
- 3.4.2 Factors considered in new course proposals include: the purpose of the course and its relevance to the institution's mission and goals; consistency with the Qualifications Framework; recommendations from experienced practitioners in industry or relevant professions; availability of qualified staff and resources, including equipment and learning resources; demand for graduates; relationship to, and likely impact on, other courses; and, appropriateness of teaching methods and assessment procedures.
- 3.4.3 Existing courses are evaluated regularly through a planned cycle of reviews in order to ensure continuing relevance and quality.
- 3.4.4 Programme reviews include assessment by academics from other institutions and; where appropriate, experienced practitioners from relevant industries and professions. The review process includes interviews with staff and students, and evaluation according to the criteria specified for this standard.
- 3.4.5 Quality indicators for all courses are reviewed at least annually by senior administrative staff and by the Quality Review Committee(s) responsible to the Academic Board.
- 3.4.6 Advisory panels are established for all professional programmes in order to provide advice on the content and quality of courses. Advisory panel membership includes leading practitioners from the relevant professions.
- 3.4.7 The programme of reviews and other matters listed in this standard are incorporated into a comprehensive Quality Improvement Plan. This plan forms a major component of the institution's overall Quality Assurance system, and is evaluated in the institutional self study.

3.5 Partnership Arrangements

- 3.5.1 Responsibilities of the local institution and the partner are clearly defined in formal agreements which are regularly reviewed with respect to the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements.
- 3.5.2 Briefings and consultations on course requirements are adequate, with mechanisms available for ongoing discussion of issues as they arise. Staff from the partner institution who are familiar with programme content visit the institution at least once annually to consult on course details and standards of assessment.
- 3.5.3 Where arrangements involve assessment of student work by partner institutions, final assessments are completed promptly and results made available to students no later than one month after submission.
- 3.5.4 Where programmes are based on those of the partner institution, courses, assignments and examinations are adapted to the local environment, using examples and illustrations relevant to Oman.
- 3.5.5 Courses are consistent with the requirements of the Oman Qualifications Framework. Professional programmes include relevant regulations and conventions appropriate to the local environment.

3.6 Distance Education

- 3.6.1 Course materials are designed appropriately for the mode of delivery.
- 3.6.2 Adequate tutorial assistance is available, with rapid response time for student enquiries, and opportunities for direct interaction with students.
- 3.6.3 The number of teaching staff per student is specified, benchmarked against comparable institutions, and implemented.
- 3.6.4 Retention and completion rates for individual courses and programmes are monitored, benchmarked, and reported regularly to the Academic Board and the governing body.
- 3.6.5 Learning resources are readily available, preferably with key documents in electronic form.

Indicators for Standards in Teaching and Learning

- Results of survey ratings by students on the relevance and quality of course content; and, staff expertise and availability.
- Ratings by students on effectiveness of courses in developing generic competencies defined by the institution.
- Employer assessment of quality of graduates, and their competence, including ability to apply generic skills.
- Student/staff ratios overall and by fields of study.
- Employment rates for graduates.
- Transition rate from the first to the second year of study.
- Rates of course completion according to minimum time and also within one year of the minimum time.
- Completion rates in courses delivered by distance education.
- Proportion of students accepted for admission to postgraduate study at recognised universities.
- Amount of staff time scheduled for individual student consultations.
- Assessment of course quality and relevance by advisory panels drawn from industry and from leading institutions.

Proposed Benchmarks *(To be suggested by the institution)*

iv. Student Administration and Support Services

Responsive, reliable, secure and accessible systems for student administration, record keeping and support services are essential for the effective operation of an institution. Students and others seeking help should be responded to courteously, immediately, and reliably by staff who are familiar with the regulations of the institution.

Institutions have responsibility for the provision of a range of support services adequate to ensure a safe, healthy and secure environment for students, and to contribute to their cultural, social, moral and physical development.

The range and extent of student services for a particular institution may vary according to the mission and the nature of the student population. Details of the services offered should be planned carefully as an integrated element in instruction and instructional support. Student Services should be adequately publicised, evaluated regularly and progressively improved as part of the quality assurance process.

Student organisations may offer some services to supplement or to extend the range of student services offered by the institution. Student organisations can provide useful learning experiences for students and can assist in ensuring that services are responsive to students' perceived needs. Where student organisations are involved, the institution has responsibility to ensure fair and equitable provision for all students, proper standards of service, and financial accountability.

The services classified as student services for the purposes of this standard include, but are not limited to: registration; assessment and learning assistance; counselling; academic advising; career guidance; employment placement services; student accommodation; cultural and sporting activities; student publications and medical services.

4. Good Practice in Student Services

4.1 Planning and Evaluation of Student Services

- 4.1.1 The range of services provided and the resources devoted to them are explicitly related to the Mission of the institution and to the special requirements of the student population.
- 4.1.2 A senior member of staff is assigned responsibility for management and development of student services.
- 4.1.3 Regular reports are made to the governing body on the extent and effectiveness of services provided.
- 4.1.4 Students are involved appropriately in the planning and review of services.
- 4.1.5 The effectiveness and relevance of services is monitored regularly through procedures which include surveys of student utilisation and satisfaction. Services are modified in response to evaluation and feedback.

4.2 Administration of Student Services

- 4.2.1 Adequate facilities and financial support are provided for required services.
- 4.2.2 Where services are provided through student organisations, managerial and organisational assistance is given, if required. There is effective oversight and reporting of financial management of student organisations.
- 4.2.3 Services requiring professional skills, such as medical services and student counselling, are provided by staff with the necessary professional qualifications. For student publications, there are clear guidelines defining standards, editorial policy, and the extent and nature of supervision by the institution.
- 4.2.4 Wherever appropriate; for example in medical and counselling services, there are effective mechanisms for follow up to ensure student welfare and to allow proper evaluation of quality of service.
- 4.2.5 Students are made aware of the range of services available and of how to gain access to services through user-friendly documents and effective orientation programmes.
- 4.2.6 Staff are familiar with the range of services available and refer students to the appropriate service when needed.

4.3 Student Residences

- 4.3.1 Residences must be of a good standard, providing a healthy, safe and secure environment for students. Residences for women should reflect cultural norms.
- 4.3.2 Adequate facilities are available to ensure privacy and to facilitate individual quiet study.
- 4.3.3 Clearly defined codes of behaviour are established, with the formal agreement of students.
- 4.3.4 Residences are effectively supervised by staff with the experience, expertise and authority to manage the facility as a learning environment.
- 4.3.5 Adequate medical facilities and satisfactory services for catering, laundry and communication are provided or are conveniently accessible.

- 4.3.6 Residences are on or near the campus, or transport facilities are provided to ensure easy access.

4.4 Student Discipline

- 4.4.1 A code of conduct is approved by the governing board and made widely available within the institution. The code specifies rights and responsibilities of students, as well as procedures for complaints, discipline, and appeal
- 4.4.2 Regulations specify action to be taken for breach of student discipline, including the responsibilities of relevant officers and committees, and penalties which may be imposed.
- 4.4.3 The procedures for student appeal against disciplinary action are clearly specified and fairly administered by persons or committees independent of the parties who initiated the disciplinary action
- 4.4.4 Disciplinary action is taken promptly. Full documentation, including details of evidence, is retained in secure institutional records

4.5 Student Records

- 4.5.1 Effective MIS systems are in place to track student data. Central files containing cumulative records of student enrolment and performance are maintained in a secure area. Back up files are maintained in a separate, secure location, preferably in a different building.
- 4.5.2 Formal policies establish the content of permanent student records and rules for retention and disposal.
- 4.5.3 Clear rules are established and maintained for governing privacy of information and for controlling access to individual student records.
- 4.5.4 Timelines for reporting and recording results and updating records are clearly defined and adhered to.
- 4.5.5 Results are finalised, officially approved, and communicated to students no later than one month after completion of requirements.

4.6 Student Admissions

- 4.6.1 Admission and student registration procedures are efficient and use appropriate computerised systems, linked to data recording and retrieval systems adequate for reporting requirements.

- 4.6.2 Student advisors familiar with details of course requirements are available to provide assistance prior to, and during, the student registration process.
- 4.6.3 Student fees are paid at the time of registration. Where institutional regulations provide for deferral of payments, the conditions and dates for payment are clearly specified in a formal agreement, signed by the student and witnessed. Opportunities for financial counselling are provided.
- 4.6.4 Rules governing admission for advanced standing are clearly specified. Opportunities for student advising are provided before, or at the time of, admission. Decisions on exemptions or advanced standing are made known to students prior to registration

Indicators for the Student and Administrative Services Standard

- User surveys regarding the range and quality of student services.
- Usage rates for specific services.
- Proportion of operating funds allocated to student services.
- Number of student disciplinary hearings and outcome.
- Number of appeals against student discipline decisions.
- Turn around time for information requests from students and members of the community.
- Time taken in finalising and communicating results of student assessments.
- Percentage of on-time payments of student fees and of non payment of fees.

Proposed Benchmarks *(To be suggested by the institution)*

v. Learning Resources

Adequate learning resources, including library and instructional support services are essential to the success of programmes designed to develop the capacity for independent learning and creative application of ideas. Educational technologies and other learning resources, both on and off line, must be up-to-date and

regularly enhanced as new material becomes available. There must be convenient access to information through interlibrary loan and the internet.

Learning resource collections should reflect the basic requirements of programmes offered by the institution, but must go well beyond immediate needs to provide access to research in journal and internet publications that capture the latest developments in relevant areas of inquiry. In institutions offering postgraduate studies and conducting research (Universities and University Colleges), these requirements are substantially greater than is the case for predominantly undergraduate institutions.

Institutions must keep pace with the rapid development of information technology and advances in flexible delivery of courses. Libraries are now advanced Learning Resource Centres, no longer simply collections of books and periodicals. Libraries should be gateways to global information for advanced research and investigation in an international context.

In order to provide information services to the community, new partnerships are evolving among professional staff - in teaching, in resource centre activities, in technical areas and in research. Conventional indicators used to assess adequacy of resources, such the number of books and journals in the Learning Resource Centre collection should be re-evaluated in light of the importance of rapid access to information systems, including turn-around time and rate of information retrieval.

Adequate resources must be provided for the acquisition, maintenance and upgrading of educational technologies and the development of learning resources. Evaluation and improvement of learning facilities and resources should be prominent in institutional self studies, and in strategies for quality improvement.

5. Good Practice in the Provision of Learning Resources

5.1 Planning and Evaluation

- 5.1.1 Clear policies are established for the development of learning resources and support services as part of institutional planning for quality improvement.
- 5.1.2 Evaluation of services includes measures of user satisfaction, extent of usage; consistency with requirements of teaching and learning; and range of services.
- 5.1.3 Priorities are established for acquiring learning resources and developing services consistent with the needs of users.

- 5.1.4 A cross-section of staff and students is involved in establishing priorities, in planning, and in evaluation.

5.2 Organisation

- 5.2.1 Learning Resource Centres offer extended hours to ensure convenient access.
- 5.2.2 Learning resources are situated appropriately and catalogued according to established practice to ensure quick access to both physical resources and electronic databases.
- 5.2.3 Cooperative agreements are established with other institutions for interlibrary loan and sharing of resources and services. Reliable systems are in place for recording data on loans and returns, with efficient follow up for overdue materials.

5.3 Support for Users

- 5.3.1 Orientation and training programmes are provided for new users in order to facilitate access to facilities and services.
- 5.3.2 Assistance is provided to users in conducting searches and analysing or applying information.
- 5.3.3 Mechanisms are in place for rapid response to inter library loan requests. Search facilities are available to assist in locating resources internally and externally.
- 5.3.4 Learning Resource Centres are staffed by a sufficient number of qualified staff with experience in relevant fields of Librarianship and Information Technology.
- 5.3.5 Reserve systems ensure adequate access to necessary learning resources for all courses offered.
- 5.3.6 Adequate arrangements are in place for distance education students to access required materials.

Indicators for the Learning Resources Standard

- Range and quality of Learning Resources available, especially IT and educational technologies

- Capacity and effectiveness of Library Management Information Systems
- Number and effectiveness of learning resource staff
- Utilisation rates and results of user satisfaction surveys.
- Success rates for users in accessing reference material.
- Internet access and average response time in obtaining materials through interlibrary loan systems.
- Number and quality of publications and journals in the full range of fields of study.
- Proportion of total budget expenditure on provision of learning support resources.

Proposed Benchmarks *(To be suggested by the institution)*

Vi Facilities and Equipment

Specific requirements for facilities and equipment will vary according to the institution's classification and its mission, programme offerings and scale of operation. Facilities and equipment, including IT and educational technologies, should meet the requirements of high quality teaching and learning as well as provide an attractive, safe and healthy environment for staff and students.

Effective management of capital assets involves choices among alternatives, often contested by internal groups with legitimate, conflicting needs. Such conflicts should be resolved within a framework of clearly defined policy which takes into account such factors as: the need for up-to-date learning resources and facilities, new programmes, requirements for research, new capital development; environmental management; minor works; maintenance; and replacement of plant and equipment.

Current provision of computers and information technology systems is an issue for all institutions. While it is important to respond to new developments in educational technologies, new IT acquisitions should not be at the expense of the facilities and resources required for conventional instruction. The pressure to adopt expensive new technologies in conflict with conventional budget priorities is usually greater for institutions engaged in advanced research where access to state-of-the-art equipment is critical.

Many institutions have adopted strategies for leasing or sharing expensive IT equipment, or for outsourcing capital financing. Such strategies should be embedded in a comprehensive financial plan based on the long term interests of the institution, with short term flexibility.

6. Good Practice in Managing Facilities and Equipment

6.1 Policy and Planning

- 6.1.1 The institution has a long term master plan approved by the governing board. The master plan provides for maintenance of facilities, capital development, major equipment acquisition, servicing and replacement.
- 6.1.2 Physical facilities, grounds and landscaping provide an attractive environment with adequate resources for the full range of institutional activities.
- 6.1.3 Equipment planning provides for regular upgrading and replacement, according to a planned schedule within a policy framework which ensures compatibility of equipment across the institution.
- 6.1.4 Business plans are prepared prior to acquisition of major equipment, with evaluation, where appropriate, of alternatives for leasing or shared use with outside agencies.
- 6.1.5 Proposals for leasing of major facilities and for outsourced construction and management of facilities are evaluated in the long term interests of the institution. Contracts are managed in a way that ensures effective quality control and financial benefits

6.2 Quality of Facilities

- 6.2.1 Facilities meet health & safety requirements with adequate provision for the personal security of staff and students.
- 6.2.2 Standards of provision for classrooms and related facilities, laboratories, and equipment for teaching, learning and research are benchmarked against equivalent standards at comparable institutions.
- 6.2.3 Provision is made for regular preventative and corrective maintenance.
- 6.2.4 Quality assessment procedures include feedback from principal users and mechanisms for considering and responding to their views.

6.3 Management & Administration

- 6.3.1 A complete inventory is maintained for equipment owned or controlled by the institution, including equipment assigned to individual staff for teaching and research.
- 6.3.2 Services such as cleaning, waste disposal, maintenance, safety, and environmental management are provided efficiently and effectively under the supervision of a senior administrative officer.
- 6.3.3 Effective security is provided for specialised teaching and research facilities and equipment, with responsibility clearly defined among individual staff members, departments or faculties, and central administration.
- 6.3.4 Scheduling of general purpose facilities is managed through an electronic booking and reservation system. The extent and efficiency of usage is monitored and reported

6.4 Research Equipment

- 6.4.1 Cooperative arrangements are made, where appropriate, with other agencies for shared ownership or shared use of research equipment.
- 6.4.2 In institutions with responsibility for research, basic equipment and laboratory facilities are available for faculty and student research in all relevant fields.
- 6.4.3 Clear policies are established regarding ownership, control and maintenance of research equipment, including equipment acquired through research grants.

6.5 Information Technology

- 6.5.1 Adequate annual budgets are provided for staff training, acquisition and replacement of equipment, and systems development.
- 6.5.2 Effective use is made of information technology for administrative systems and for internal and external communications.
- 6.5.3 An institution-wide acquisitions and replacement policy for software and hardware is implemented to ensure compatibility of systems and equipment.

- 6.5.4 Instructional and learning support facilities, equipment and services are accessible to all staff and students.
- 6.5.5 An adequate infrastructure is provided to support servicing and maintenance of systems and equipment.
- 6.5.6 Security systems and firewalls are implemented to protect sensitive institutional information, and to protect against viruses.
- 6.5.7 A code of conduct is established to deal with inappropriate use of material on the internet.
- 6.5.8 Staff professional development programmes are available to ensure effective development of IT skills.
- 6.5.9 Internal information systems are compatible with external reporting requirements.

Indicators for the Facilities and Equipment Standard

- Utilisation rates for teaching facilities, including ratios of hours booked to hours used.
- Usable floor area per full time student, with rates for particular functions, such as teaching space and laboratory space.
- User satisfaction surveys regarding classroom, laboratory, learning resource and IT facilities.
- Existence of sound business plans for acquisition of major equipment.
- Reports on condition of buildings and equipment and follow-up systems.
- Regulated and quantified maintenance reporting systems and percent expenditure on corrective maintenance.
- Replacement rate for IT equipment.

Proposed Benchmarks

(Suggestions to be made the Institution)

vii Financial Planning and Management

Institutions must have sufficient financial resources to support the full operation of the institution. Financial resources should be at a level comparable to standards set by recognised external institutions with a similar profile. Financial resources are to be used effectively and efficiently for the maximum benefit of students, as well as for the long term growth and development of the institution.

Annual budgets and financial reports should be approved by the governing board, and the board kept informed of levels of expenditure in relation to established budgets. A board committee should monitor closely the budget planning process and levels of expenditure to ensure that the board properly exercises its responsibility for financial control.

Responsibility for overall budgeting, accounting and financial management systems should rest with the Central administration, with appropriate delegation of authority to heads of department for specified levels of expenditure within their costs centres. Regular management reports should be provided to cost centre managers, and preferably available on line through the MIS, so that budget managers can monitor their budgets efficiently.

7. Good Practice in Financial Planning and Management

7.1 Financial Planning and Budgeting

- 7.1.1 Budget planning and resource allocation reflect the mission and goals of the institution.
- 7.1.2 Annual budgets are developed within the context of long term projections for revenue and expenditure, adjusted in the light of experience.
- 7.1.3 Budget proposals are developed by senior administrative staff in consultation with cost centre managers. Proposals are reviewed by a board sub-committee and then presented to the full board for approval.
- 7.1.4 Private institutions operate primarily to serve society through the provision of education. Their main purpose is not to make a profit.
- 7.1.5 Proposals for new ventures, programmes, equipment or facilities are accompanied by business plans, an explicit development strategy, independently verified cost estimates and analysis of relevant cost impacts in the short and longer terms.
- 7.1.6 Debt and liquidity ratios are monitored and benchmarked against commercial practice and equivalent ratios in appropriate outside Higher Education institutions.

- 7.1.7 The ratio of expenditure on salaries to total expenditure is planned and monitored, taking into account variations for departments with different cost structures.
- 7.1.8 Borrowing is used sparingly as a strategy to improve capacity, rather than to meet short term operating costs. Obligations are to be met from realistically expected additional revenue, or from known existing revenue sources.
- 7.1.9 Financial planning should be based on diversification of revenue through a range of activities consistent with the charter and mission of the institution.

7.2 Financial Management

- 7.2.1 High level management of budgeting and accounting is through a centralised business office headed by a senior administrative officer.
- 7.2.2 The delegation of financial authority is clearly specified. Conformity with regulations and reporting requirements is confirmed through official audit procedures.
- 7.2.3 Cost centre managers are consulted in the budget planning process, and are held accountable for expenditure within their approved budgets.
- 7.2.4 The accounting system provides for accurate monitoring of expenditure and commitments against budgets, with monthly reports prepared for each cost centre and for the institution as a whole. Variations from estimates of expenditure are tracked and accounted for. The impact on annual budget projections is assessed.
- 7.2.5 Accounting systems comply with accepted professional accounting standards; and, insofar as possible, costs are attributed to particular activities.
- 7.2.6 The accounting and reporting systems ensure that funds provided for particular purposes are used exclusively for those purposes.
- 7.2.7 Where possibilities of conflict of interest exist, either actual or perceived, the persons concerned declare their interest and refrain from participation in related decisions.
- 7.2.8 Financial carry forward provisions are sufficiently flexible to avoid rushed end-of-year expenditure and interference with long term planning.

7.3 Auditing and Risk Assessment

- 7.3.1 Planning procedures include independently verified risk assessment and sensitivity analysis. Risk minimisation strategies are in place and adequate reserves maintained to meet realistically assessed financial impacts.
- 7.3.2 Accounting and business managers are not involved in internal audits. Accountability flows directly to the chief executive officer or to the chair of the relevant sub-committee of the governing body.
- 7.3.3 External audits are conducted annually by a reputable external audit firm which is independent of the institution, of senior staff in the institution, and of members of the governing body.

Indicators for the Financial Management and Planning Standard

- Proportion of total funding from different funding sources.
- Comments in external audit management reports.
- Amount of revenue from commercial activities.
- Net return on equity in commercial activities.
- Disposable asset/debt ratio.
- Liquidity ratio.
- Trend data for operating surplus or deficit in relation to financing strategies.
- Ratio of loan and interest payments to total revenue.
- Staff salaries as a proportion of total revenue.

Proposed Benchmarks *(To be suggested by Institutions)*

viii. Staffing and Employment Policies and Practices

The effectiveness of any institution is highly dependent on the performance of staff. While the quality of staff that an institution can attract depends on the salaries that are offered and the availability of qualified personnel, employment policies and practices can make a significant difference. Hence employment policies and practices are an important part of the Quality Assurance process.

Institutions should have a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for recruitment, retention, staff development, and succession planning. Institutions should provide the conditions conducive to satisfying and professionally rewarding careers. Staffing policies should be considered as part of the general strategy to achieve the mission of the institution, taking into account relevant circumstances in the environment.

An important element in employment strategy is the development of an ideal staffing profile including the desired mix of age, gender, qualifications, experience, and diversity of background. The profile should reflect broader policy considerations such as Omanisation.

Regular evaluation of staff performance with support for improvement should be universal. It is equally important that institutions assess regularly the effectiveness of their staffing policies and procedures. This requires monitoring and benchmarking performance by senior administrative staff. Annual reports on staff performance should be prepared for presentation to the governing board.

8. Good Practice in Staffing and Employment Procedures

8.1 Staffing and Employment Policies

8.1.1 A staffing profile appropriate to the mission of the institution is approved by the governing body. The profile includes appropriate qualifications and experience, age structure, gender balance, classification levels, cultural mix, educational background, and Omanisation levels. Progress in achieving the staffing profile is monitored regularly.

8.1.2 A comprehensive set of policies and regulations published in an employment manual is distributed throughout the institution. The manual includes rights and responsibilities of staff, as well as procedures for: recruitment; supervision; support and counselling; institutional services; performance appraisal; professional development; complaints; discipline; and appeals.

8.1.3 Effective strategies for succession planning are implemented.

- 8.1.4 Staffing and employment processes are administered centrally, with appropriate delegation of authority to managers at various levels in the organisation. There is provision for: effective supervision of staff; reward for outstanding performance; and adequate professional development opportunities.
- 8.1.5 Indicators of successful implementation of staffing and employment policies are clearly specified. Performance is benchmarked against successful practice elsewhere. At least annually, the chief executive officer reports to the governing board on staffing and employment practices, including regarding performance appraisal results.

8.2 Recruitment

- 8.2.1 The chief executive officer is appointed by the governing board, on the recommendation of a selection committee that includes both board members and experienced senior staff. Responsibility for advertising, reference checks and verification of qualifications is assigned to senior staff of the institution or outsourced to a reputable independent recruitment firm. Normally, the search for candidates involves public advertising specifying qualifications, skills and experience relevant to the mission and nature of the institution.
- 8.2.2 The governing board approves appointments of senior staff as specified by policy. Members of the board participate in selection committees with internal representatives (and, if appropriate, external representatives). The chief executive officer or delegate is responsible for the process. Measures to avoid potential conflict of interest are observed strictly.
- 8.2.3 Senior academic appointments are made on the recommendation of committees which include, if possible and appropriate, external senior academics able to benchmark against appropriate international standards of scholarship and research.
- 8.2.4 Where appointments are to be made through internal promotion or transfer, approval is given on the basis of a clear rationale reflecting the agreed staffing profile and hiring policies.
- 8.2.5 Where appointments are to be made either from within or from outside the institution, positions are advertised publicly and internal candidates are given adequate opportunity to apply.
- 8.2.6 Candidates are provided with full position descriptions and conditions of employment, as well as general information about the institution, its mission and programmes. The information provided includes details of

- employment expectations, as well as details of performance appraisal procedures.
- 8.2.7 Short-listed candidates are interviewed by appropriate selection committees. References are consulted and statements of experience and qualifications are verified. Assessment of qualifications includes verification of the standing and reputation of the institutions from which qualifications were obtained.
- 8.2.8 Assignment of particular responsibilities to newly appointed personnel is in keeping with their qualifications and experience.
- 8.2.9 New staff are given an effective orientation to ensure familiarity with the institution, its services, programmes and priorities.

8.3 Personal & Career Development

- 8.3.1 All staff are appraised annually. The supervisor discusses the implementation of the performance appraisal scheme with each staff member before he or she is evaluated, clearly specifying the performance criteria. Confidential formal consultations regarding the results of evaluation are held with each staff member and are supportive. Where performance is considered less than satisfactory, clear requirements for improvement are established.
- 8.3.2 Formal performance assessments are documented and retained confidentially. Staff members have the opportunity to put their own comments on file, including points of disagreement.
- 8.3.3 Outstanding academic or administrative performance is recognised and rewarded.
- 8.3.4 Promotion criteria relate to the mission of the institution. In the case of academic staff, criteria include: quality of teaching; achievement of learning outcomes; continuous improvement of performance; service to the institution; and service to the public.
- 8.3.5 Supervisors discuss with their staff strategies for development of skills and career advancement. Supervisors assist in arranging professional development activities, including upgrading of qualifications.
- 8.3.6 As part of succession planning, junior staff with leadership potential are identified and given experience appropriate for future career development.
- 8.3.7 The institutional professional development plan includes the development of new programmes and policy initiatives.

8.3.8 The procedures for performance appraisal are applied to the chief executive officer. In this case, the chair of the governing board acts as supervisor.

8.4 Discipline, Complaints and Dispute Resolution

8.4.1 Procedures for dealing with complaints, and resolving disputes are clearly specified in institutional regulations.

8.4.2 The initial step in resolving disputes is through conciliation by an independent party, with referral, where appropriate, to a committee or senior officer for decision.

8.4.3 Disciplinary procedures, regarding, for example, neglect of responsibilities, failure to comply with instructions, or inappropriate behaviour, are clearly specified in the regulations.

8.4.4 The regulations for disciplinary matters provide for the right of appeal to a person or committee at least one level above that at which the dispute occurred.

8.4.5 The governing board has established procedures for complaints or disputes involving the chief executive officer; or, for matters which the chief executive officer may wish to refer to the board for resolution.

8.4.6 Serious disputes should be addressed through quasi judicial procedures, including verification of evidence and impartial judgment by expert(s).

Indicators for Staffing and Employment Procedures

- Rates of turnover for academic and administrative staff.
- Number of applications in response to employment advertisements.
- Number/proportion of staff holding official positions in recognised academic, research or professional organisations.
- Number of formal complaints or disputes brought against staff members as a proportion of total staff.
- Breadth and diversity of background of academic staff as indicated by the country where the highest qualification was obtained, ethnic background and other relevant criteria.

- Proportion of academic staff holding doctoral degrees.
- Proportion of preferential staff in specified employment categories; eg, proportion of Omani nationals; women in senior positions.
- Proportion of staff rating the institution positively on confidential opinion surveys.
- Proportion of staff participating in formal professional development programmes.
- Assessment of the value of orientation programmes by new staff.
- Staff assessment of the value of performance appraisal systems.

Proposed Benchmarks *(to be suggested by Institutions)*

ix. Research

In order to operate in the Sultanate, Universities and University Colleges are required to have substantial involvement in research. High calibre research activity is essential for the academic standing of a University or University College as well as for effective teaching of post graduate research programmes.

While staff in the Colleges of Higher Education usually are not required to conduct research, they should be encouraged to do so; and, at a minimum, should be familiar with the latest developments in their fields. Action research in undergraduate programmes should be promoted, in order to help ensure high quality teaching and scholarship, as well as to advance career development.

Universities and University Colleges must invest significantly in research infrastructures, including scholarly resources, IT and internet communication facilities, laboratories, research space and equipment. Adequate research resources should be available for all postgraduate students as well as staff. It is expected that basic research resources will be supplemented over time by advanced and specialised equipment acquired through research grants.

The research function also has important implications for staffing. In order to develop an effective research programme, the staffing complement must include a critical number of senior academics who conduct research at the forefront of their disciplines and also provide leadership for their junior colleagues.

Academic research is important because of its potential to contribute to both regional and national economic development; accordingly, priorities for research should reflect relevant government economic priorities. At the same time motivation for research arises naturally from the interests of faculty whose individual creative efforts can result in long term benefits to the institution and to the nation. Research development strategies, therefore, should accommodate legitimate individual priorities as well as regional and national priorities.

The international reputation of Universities and University Colleges is largely dependent on the extent and quality of their research activity. That reputation in turn is a significant factor in the capacity of institutions to attract and retain high quality academic staff, and to access international research networks. Consequently it is vitally important to ensure that quality in research can be demonstrated clearly in terms appreciated by the international academic community. Universities and University Colleges should have clearly specified research development plans linked to the institution's mission, with performance indicators benchmarked against appropriate international institutions. Annual reports on the results of research should be provided to the governing board.

9. Good Practice in Research in Higher Education

9.1 Institutional Policies

- 9.1.1 A research development plan consistent with the nature and mission of the institution and the economic development needs of the region is developed, published and appropriately distributed.
- 9.1.2 The research development plan includes clearly specified indicators and benchmarks of performance. Reports on overall institutional performance are published annually.
- 9.1.3 For new or expanding Universities and University Colleges, ambitious but achievable targets are set for development of research activity.
- 9.1.4 Cooperation with local industry and with other research agencies is actively encouraged.
- 9.1.5 Mechanisms are established for collaboration and cooperation with leading international universities and research networks.
- 9.1.6 A high level committee is established to monitor compliance with ethical standards and to approve research projects.

- 9.1.7 The research programme includes investigation of significant aspects of institutional activities with a report to the chief executive officer and to the governing board

9.2 Commercialisation of Research

- 9.2.1 Before investment by the institution is authorised, ideas with potential for commercial exploitation are critically evaluated by experts from industry and from relevant professions.
- 9.2.2 Strategies are developed for capitalising on the expertise of faculty and postgraduate students in providing services to the public and in generating funds. This may involve establishment of a research development office to identify institutional expertise and commercial development opportunities; to assist in developing proposals and business plans; to prepare contracts; and to develop spin-off companies.
- 9.2.3 Intellectual property policies define ownership; establish procedures for commercialising ideas developed by staff and students; and, ensure equitable sharing of returns to the inventor(s), and to the institution.
- 9.2.4 A culture of entrepreneurship is actively encouraged throughout the institution, especially for academic staff and postgraduate students.

9.3 Facilities and Equipment

- 9.3.1 Sufficient laboratory space and equipment, as well as library and information resources are available to support the core research activities of staff and students in all major fields.
- 9.3.2 An adequate budget is provided for funding research equipment and facilities.
- 9.3.3 Security systems ensure safety for research activities and for the academic community.
- 9.3.4 Policies are established to make clear the ownership and responsibility for maintenance of equipment obtained through faculty research grants or through commissioned research.

Indicators for Standards of Research

- Proportion of academic staff with specified levels of research output.

- Number of refereed research publications per full time academic staff member.
- Success rate in competitive research grant applications and proportion of staff holding competitive research grants.
- Average number of research citations per full time academic staff member.
- Funds generated through research grants.
- Funds generated through commercialising intellectual property
- Number of patents per full time academic staff member.
- Number of joint Research and Development (R&D) projects in cooperation with industry or with staff in international or national institutions.
- Proportion of students enrolled in postgraduate research programmes.
- Student completion rates for postgraduate research programmes.

Proposed Benchmarks *(to be suggested by institutions of Higher Education)*

x. Community Relationships

The relationships between higher education institutions and the communities they serve are important for a number of reasons.

As influential members of the community, Higher Education institutions have a general obligation to cooperate with other members of the community for mutual benefit. In addition, institutions of Higher Education have as their central responsibility the provision of educational services to meet the needs of the community. Most government institutions; for example, the Colleges of Education and Colleges of Higher Technology are fully supported by government funding and most private institutions benefit from government scholarships and grants for students.

Higher Education institutions have a special capacity to contribute to the community because of their resources in qualified and experienced staff covering a range of academic or professional fields, and because of their facilities for teaching, research and cultural activities. As a result, it is common for institutions of Higher Education to encourage staff to participate in community life as relevant

to their professional expertise; to develop research or consultancy programmes focusing on local requirements; and, to provide services for the benefit to of the community, including access to cultural activities.

The role of Higher Education institutions in providing assistance and support to other educational institutions, especially schools, can be of great benefit to the institutions involved and can also result in attracting more and better qualified students to Higher Education.

The concept of community should be interpreted broadly, to include not only the geographic region in which the institution is located, but also the academic and professional communities with which it interacts. The institution can not only contribute to the development of academic and professional communities but also benefit from their expertise and resources.

The way an institution presents itself to the community is important. Successful institutions work hard to ensure that their activities are valued by the community, that their services are widely publicised and understood, and that they have a good reputation. The reputation of the institution is a vital factor in attracting and retaining high quality students and staff, in securing funding and endowments, in attracting research projects, and in ensuring community support.

10. Good Practice in Developing Community Relationships

10.1 Community Relationships

10.1.1 Policies on the service role of the institution are formally established by the governing board, and are reflected in its mission, goals and objectives. Policies are evaluated systematically. The contribution of the institution is quantified and presented in annual reports.

10.1.2 Staff are actively encouraged to contribute to wider community activities and their contributions are reflected in staff performance appraisal and in promotion criteria.

10.1.3 The institution arranges or participates in regular forums for discussion of significant community issues with influential members of the community.

10.1.4 Key staff participate in regional strategic planning activities and cooperate in the implementation of new initiatives.

10.1.5 Drawing on the expertise of members of academic staff, the institution cooperates in the establishment of community support for professional service agencies relevant to the needs of the community.

- 10.1.6 Strong positive relationships are established with local industries and employers in order to assist with placement of students in work study programmes, to secure part time employment opportunities, and to identify problems for student projects.
- 10.1.7 Local employers and professional staff are invited to join appropriate programme and institutional advisory committees.
- 10.1.8 The institution maintains continuing contact with schools in the region, arranging enrichment activities; offering assistance and support in areas of specialisation; and providing information about higher education and career opportunities.

10.2 Reputation in the Community

- 10.2.1 A comprehensive strategy for monitoring and improving the reputation of the institution in relevant communities is developed and implemented, with regular assessment against predetermined benchmarks.
- 10.2.2 Clear policy guidelines for speaking publicly on behalf of the institution are established. Normally public comments are restricted to the chief executive officer or a media officer responsible to the chief executive officer.
- 10.2.3 Clear policy guidelines are established for public comments on community issues by staff, where such comments could be associated with the institution.
- 10.2.4 An institutional media office manages media communications, seeks information about internal activities of potential interest, and arranges for publication.
- 10.2.5 Community views of the institution and its activities are systematically gathered and analysed. Strategies for improving perceptions of the institution are developed.
- 10.2.6 Issues or concerns about operational matters raised in the public forum are dealt with immediately and objectively by the chief executive officer or delegate.

Indicators of Good Practice in Developing Community Relations

- Proportion of positive and negative media comment about the institution.

- Community opinion of institutional quality and reputation as expressed in surveys.
- Community views of the institution's contributions to the community.
- Senior secondary students' knowledge of the institution and its programmes.
- Proportion of school leavers from the region seeking entry to the institution.
- Proportion of top performing regional secondary school students who indicate the institution as their first choice for further study.
- Employer willingness to participate in cooperative education and work-based learning programmes.
- Number of community-oriented events or special activities attended by external members of the community.
- Number and proportion of alumni participating in institution sponsored activities.
- Level of sponsorship and financial contributions by the community.

Proposed Benchmarks (*Suggested by the Institution of Higher Education*)