

OQNHE

Message from Her Excellency Dr. Rawya Al Busaidi, Minister of Higher Education

Patron, Oman Quality Network in Higher Education

When the *Oman Quality Network*, as it was then named, was launched in September 2006, it was with the hope of improving the quality of Oman's higher education institutions (HEIs) by providing leadership and support through sharing ideas, strategies, research and good practice according to its mission statement.

Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives. (William A Foster)

Over the past seven years, the network, now called the OQNHE, the *Oman Quality Network in Higher Education*, has come to be considered a successful knowledge hub engaging higher education institutions in productive discussion and dialogue with the aim of encouraging knowledge exchange and capacity-building.

The OQNHE has attracted membership from HEIs throughout the Sultanate; and, as judged by Remarkable Performance, a UK consultancy team, the Network is making good progress in achieving its mission through effective service to the higher education sector. The Executive Committee of the OQNHE is to be credited for this, along with the constituent members,

all of whom contribute time, energy and resources in a voluntary capacity. Initiatives such as the OQNHE E-newsletter are indicative of the commitment of the OQNHE to improving the quality of Oman's higher education institutions by inculcating and sharing best practice.

The OQNHE is to be congratulated on a remarkable achievement in its successful promotion of a collaborative approach to quality enhancement in higher education. I would like to express my thanks to all contributors who have embraced the idea of sharing good practice by submitting articles for this E-newsletter.

Message from the OQNHE Chair

On behalf of Oman Quality Network for Higher Education (OQNHE) Executive Committee members, I would like to thank everyone who has prepared the articles for the second edition which has been published. I also would like to invite the members of the higher education family whether they are working in the government institutions or the private institutions to participate in the newsletter. The newsletter will be published three times a year. People who are interested in publishing their articles should



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send their articles to Ms. Hannah Manogaran (hannah@icemoman.com) or Ms. Fakhriyah Al Habisi (fakhriya@oaaa.gov.om). The aim of OQNHE is to enhance the partnership and the networking among the sector. Recently OQNHE has approved five strategic goals which are

1. To develop a quality culture by providing leadership and support in quality enhancement initiatives to the higher education sector
2. To continue to build capacity through the provision and enhancement of support and training opportunities
3. Creating, developing and maintaining/implementing an independent structure that supports the mission and realize the vision of the OQNHE.

4. Ensuring a sustainable source of income and financial viability
5. Establishing and maintaining relationships with external bodies.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all individuals who are working in the higher education sector and I would also like to make a call to everyone to help in enhancing the higher education sector in Oman and join the quality enhancement journey which is never-ending.



Dr. Taki Al Abduwani
Chair, OQNHE Executive Committee, Honorary Professor, International University of Vienna PhD, University of Reading, UK

H.E. Dr. Rawya Al Busaidi meets the OQNHE Executive Committee



Her Excellency Dr. Rawya Al Busaidi, the Minister of Higher Education met the Oman Quality Network in Higher Education Executive Committee Members. She appreciated the efforts taken by the OQNHE members to self regulate the sector. She encouraged the network to have a number of workshops through which best practice can be shared.

Establishing Quality Assurance Units

It is logical for any business to be successful; we have to work hard, we have to have integrity, customers look for quality product and the business has to make profit with minimum expenses. So then, do we need a department called "Quality Assurance" when it is pure commonsense to do the things in the right way?

Quality Assurance in the field of education is a bit complex. Education is the backbone of any country.

The young student minds are the future brains of the country. Hence education serves a national need. Half-baked graduates are a drain on government resources. So whether an institution is public or private, in reality it belongs to the country. Countries are competing against each other in research and development. Unless these young minds are nurtured and developed, a country cannot compete in the interna-

You seldom improve quality by cutting costs, but you can often cut costs by improving quality."

- Karl Albrecht

tional arena.

The government has a huge responsibility to make sure that systems and procedures are in place to ensure accountability to the nation. Hence the government concerns about transparency and accountability of all education providers is highly justified.

Colleges are generally measured by student numbers. They have shortened semesters, condensed programs, exam centered teaching and re-sits after re-sits to push the students to the next level. In the short run, this gives good student progression rates. The graduates thus produced don't have the necessary skills in the job market. Employers are dissatisfied. The staff turnover of the institution is also high as staff get demotivated and this results in staff brain drain. The reputation of the institution gets reduced and in the long run this is a loss not only to the insti-

tution but also to the country as well.

Quality Assurance Units or departments help bridge this gap between the institution and the nation. They make sure institutions follow the guidelines set by the government in adhering to quality. This in return helps the institutions themselves in sustainable quality delivery of their teaching, learning, research and community service.

Quality is an outcome of commonsense but delivered in a structured and systematic manner. If all institutions have a society centered approach they can operate for maximum benefit not only for themselves but also for the growth of the nation.



Hannah Manogaran
Executive Committee Member, OQNHE Asst Head of Standards and Quality International College of Engineering and Management

The Personal Tutoring System at Gulf College

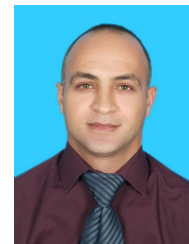
Gulf College recognises the importance of ensuring that students have the necessary and appropriate guidance to enable them to make the best decisions regarding their education, and to give them the best opportunity to succeed. One of the ways to achieve this is through the Personal Tutoring System. Personal Tutoring System at the Gulf College forms an important part of the job functions of every tutor at Gulf College. The functions of Personal Tutors are broad one and include the requirement to support the academic and personal development of each student individually throughout their study period.

Each academic staff member at Gulf

College provides personal tutoring to approximately 35 students. Students are guided and mentored in matters related to their academic progress, areas that need improvements and assistance, academic results, registration process, rules and regulations of the College, appeals, plagiarism, disciplinary procedures, personal need, providing counseling or mentoring when required. Personal tutors inform the appropriate members of staff in case of potential problems and liaise with the student department in case of health related problems encountered by students and handle other student grievances.

The Personal tutors have to allocate 5

hours per week for personal tutoring purpose. Besides they organise two meetings in a semester and initiate induction group meetings with the tutees at the beginning of a semester. All meetings with tutees are recorded with dates and timings. Personal tutors act in a professional manner and the details of meetings are kept confidential. GC initiates workshops for tutors and orientation programme is given to new tutors to ensure its success and efficiency.



Dr. Khalid Abu Zayed
Head—Faculty of Business Studies
Gulf College

Oman College of Management and Technology Accreditation Process

Oman College of Management & Technology (OCMT) is one of the HEIs that underwent the accreditation process in 2010/2011. As this step was quite new to the OCMT as for other institutions as well, OAAA report included some shocking feedbacks for most of the HEIs in Oman. Irrespective of the reasons behind much of these recommendations, OCMT management has taken a very serious decision to overcome the shortcomings as soon as possible. The affirmations are also being looked into to improve the existing practices. OCMT had initiated an operational plan with very strict commitment in order to review its strategies, committees, and constitution including top management policies. Action plan was also there which helped the bodies in-

The quality of an organization can never exceed the quality of the minds that make it up.

- Dwight David Eisenhower

involved to follow the progression of the operation plan.

The operational plan was initiated in 2010 and is scheduled to be accomplished by the end of the academic year (2012/2013). On 28th December 2012, QA committee from MOHE has visited the college for two days to follow up our operational and action plan progression. According to final quality audit report, we have completed 29 out of 31 recommendations and 11 out of 12 affirmations. It should be noted that these incomplete recommendations and affirmation was due to some unforeseen issues.

However, OCMT wasn't only working on the recommendations alone. On the contrary, OCMT committees went beyond that by reviewing the college system at large. This allowed OCMT to become stronger in terms of academic services, online services, communication services, etc.

Finally, we are happy with what have achieved so far. We look forward to continue these practices and hope to continuously interact with QA bodies in Oman, so that all round quality of educational services are always kept high.



Qasim Abdullah Al-Ajmi
Assistant Dean
OCMT

Meeting the Needs of the OQNHE Stakeholders

A number of needs analyses have been carried out by the OQNHE in the past in order to identify areas for future training opportunities and to enhance quality in the HE sector. A national consultation was sponsored by the British Council which highlighted the importance of targeting training for specific stakeholders. The OAAA has also identified areas from quality audits carried out so far which the sector would benefit from having training in, such as generating and using institutional data.

What's measured improves

- Peter Drucker

The OQNHE Executive Committee has recently sought views from its members on how it can best serve the quality enhancement needs of the sector in the future. This included not only the topic areas that higher education institutions would like to have covered but also the location and the means of delivery.

A number of areas for quality enhancement training and capacity building have been identified by the OQNHE members which mostly included areas such as strategic planning, KPIs and benchmarking. The OQNHE executive committee is currently planning to conduct workshops during the year 2013 aiming at addressing the training needs of the sector.



Fakhriya Al Habsi
OQNHE Administrative Officer
Quality Assurance Officer
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Update from the OAAA



The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) has a number of significant projects in the pipeline for this year. As well as moving to a new location, the OAAA has had a new organisational structure approved which means there will be a focus on recruitment and internal capacity building activities. The appointment of the Planning and Development Advisor, Ms Alya Al Rawahi, in September 2012, has enabled the OAAA to carry out a review of its planning activities and develop its 2013-2020 Strategic Plan which is scheduled to be finalised mid-2013. One of the main goals will be the development of the second stage of the institutional accreditation process - Standards Assessment - alongside the program accreditation project. Two Quality Assur-

ance Consultants have been recruited to work with the OAAA on these projects this year and should be joining the OAAA shortly. The external review process for General Foundation Programs is also flagged for development this year. In the meantime, 19 Quality Audits are underway, including 13 Ministry of Health Educational Institutes. This means that by the end of 2013, over 80% of HEIs in Oman will have been through the Quality Audit process. The Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges has been carrying out visits to follow up on actions that private HEIs have taken in response to the formal conclusions in Quality Audit reports. The OAAA plans to continue to support the work of the OQNHE and appreciates the key role that it has to play in enhancing quality in the higher education sector in Oman and promoting the sharing of good practice.



Dr. Tess Goodliffe
Quality Assurance Expert
OAAA

Teaching, Learning and the role of External Examiners at Gulf College

As a leading higher education institution, Gulf College lays great emphasis to raise the standards of academic achievement for students of all abilities. The provision to continuously maintain the standard of teaching and learning that enhances the achievement of students and developing strategies through the curriculum has been beneficial for the academic process. The College adopts an effective range of teaching and learning strategies including the use of various teaching methods in the classrooms. The curriculum is broad based, balanced and differentiated which is relevant to the needs of the job

market. The learning and progress of students incorporates Personal Learning and Critical Thinking Skills.

Gulf College has relevant system for staff development to support, maintain and enhance the standard of teaching and learning opportunities that goes on with the curriculum. Teaching is student centred and involves students in their learning through the development of their awareness about the cognitive processes useful in this regard.

The teaching and learning leading to

assessments at Gulf College is routinely moderated by the External Examiners who come from various U.K. universities and contribute greatly to the development of the provision. They moderate the assessment papers and the marking and grading done at the College. Further, the External Examiners look at various other aspects such as academic standards of

the modules and the quality and coherence of the programmes and judge the overall standards of student performance and the extent to which assessment processes are appropriate and challenging, ensure parity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted within the programmes' framework. The good practices at Gulf College in teaching and learning and external

moderation have added value to the academic process.



Rizwan Ahmad
Assistant Dean —
Affiliation Affairs
Gulf College

Workshop on Quantum Teaching

OQNHE organized a workshop titled 'Quantum Teaching' on 5th March, 2013 at the College of Banking and Financial Studies. This workshop was open to representatives from all Higher Education institutions in the Sultanate. The workshop was conducted by Ms. Asfia Khan, Head of Student Success Centre at the Middle East College. This workshop was based on theories of education and provided hands-on ideas grounded in research to enthuse students. The workshop focused on techniques for developing a respectful, mutually empowering learning environment regardless of the curriculum content. Insights were provided on the right state of mind for teaching and learning, formatting a lecture to



engage all students, using metaphors to motivate students, and the value of voice modulation, space anchoring and flip charts.

The attendees were exposed to practical experience in groups; constructive feedback was given on their performance. There was opportunity for discussion and clarifying doubts. The attendees enthusiastically participated in the six-hour workshop and left feeling rejuvenated with many 'do-it-today' practical strategies for creating the environment, attitude and structure for successful teaching and learning.



Utilising technology to effectively conduct staff appraisal

One important QA-related activity conducted regularly by nearly all organisations is the measure of staff performance. In order to streamline the process and ensure everybody in the College effectively performs his role, Nizwa College of Technology embarked on a project to use information technologies to migrate its staff appraisal process from the old cumbersome paper-based approach to a new, sleeker strategy – putting it online.

In this scheme, old paper-based forms are re-designed and made available via a web browser. Several levels of users were created: first the staff, to fill in the part for self-appraisal (this also serves as the basis for one-to-one discussion with his immediate superior to set the goals for

the year), then the immediate superior, to enter the mark from aggregated student feedback of the staff, as well as his own observations on the staff character, attitude and skills (based on set criteria), his comments and observations of the staff throughout the academic year, and his recommendations for perceived staff development. Another user level is the line manager, to

**The word
'Quality' was
coined by
Roman
philosopher
Cicero**

approve or modify comments and observations of the immediate superior to the staff (by writing his own comments and observations). Lastly, the whole process is seen by the College Dean for final approval.

The good thing about all this is

the efficiency of the approach: each section or department head can immediately see who has finished filling-up his/her self-appraisal part and ready for his/her marking and observations, while those in top management can easily see the summary of the staff appraisal process and prepare the required training plan based on inputted information.

After using this approach for two cycles now, the NCT community starts to prefer the paperless approach in other QA-related activities than traditional ones. There is no turning back.



Dr. Rolando M. Lontok
Head
Centre for Educational
Technology
Nizwa College of
Technology

Improving the Quality of Healthcare through Health Professions Education

Health professional educators act as the bridge between the knowledge and the recipients of care. As new health professions have emerged over the past century, governmental and professional bodies and organizations have addressed the need for health professions education reform. Oman's goal to build its educational infrastructure in order to meet health care demands and achieve self-reliance started in the 1980's. A number of its re-organizational plans targeted the following areas: reorganization of the nursing institutes, collaboration with universities overseas, improvement of the education system, and the refinement of a strong continuing professional educational development system.

The country's healthcare system is being reformed. The expansion of the health workforce has enabled the country to set up the foundation for further developments in the field of

healthcare. In view of recognizing the need to improve the healthcare system in the country, the MOH is taking active steps to formulate its Health Vision 2050 policy; its main goal is the development of Omani human resources and enhancing their productivity as well as capabilities by continuously developing the healthcare sector of the country.

The goal of The Ministry of Health (MOH) is to build its educational infrastructure in order to meet healthcare demands and achieve self-reliance. A main area targeted by the ministry is the future path of health professions education and the importance of producing graduates of high quality that are able to serve not just the Omani community, but to build on and enhance the future of the health profession services through continuously enhancing the quality of its health professions education.

Currently the Quality Assurance Section at the Directorate General of Education and Training is directing its effort on establishing a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) system and a quality culture for all the health professional institutions. This process relies heavily on an organisational culture that is proactive and supports continuous learning. Thus, efforts are directed towards empowerment and autonomy of the people involved in the services of the institutes .



Nada H. Al-Moosa
Head, Quality
Assurance
Section
Directorate General of
Education and Training
Ministry of Health

Upcoming Workshops

The Oman Quality Network in Higher Education (OQNHE) is organizing another workshop focusing on Teaching and Learning Strategies in HEIs, 'Encouraging Progressive Pedagogy' on **Tuesday 19 March 2013** from **10:00 am to 4:00 pm** at Mazoon College (Hall C-Second floor). This workshop is targeted at teachers employed in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

A 'pedagogical progressive' is someone who uses teaching methods founded in the progressive movement of the late 19th/early 20th century which advocated a child-centered approach to education.

For more information on this workshop please contact Fakhriya Al Habsi at fakhriya@oaaa.gov.om

Editorial Team

Hannah Manogaran

*Asst Head of Standards and Quality
International College of Engineering and Management*

Dr (Lt Col) Rabie'e Al-Rashdy

*Commandant (Dean)
Armed Forces Medical Services School*

Dr Azzah Ahmed Al Maskari

*Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs
Ibra College of Technology*

Dr. Tess Goodliffe

*Quality Assurance Expert
OAAA*

Contact Details

Fakhriya A. Al Habsi
Quality Assurance Officer
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
Tel: 968 24121606
Fax: 968 24121231
Al Khuwair
P.O Box: 1255
P.C: 133

Executive Members of OQNHE



Dr. Taki Al Abduwani (Chair)
Dean
Gulf College



Dr. Yaseen Al Lawati (Secretary)
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Oman Medical College



Dr. Salem Al-Touby (Treasurer)
Dean
Oman Nursing Institute



Dr (Lt Col) Rabie'e Al-Rashdy
Commandant (Dean)
Armed Forces Medical Services School



Hannah Manogaran
Asst Head of Standards and Quality
International College of Engineering and Management



Amal Al Amri
Head of Quality Assurance Unit and Student Experience Office
The Middle East College



Dr Azzah Ahmed Al Maskari
Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs
Ibra College of Technology



Dr. Tess Goodliffe
Quality Assurance Expert
OAAA



Fakhriya A. Al Habsi
Quality Assurance Officer
OAAA