Audit Report Number 028

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OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This Quality Audit Report (the ‘Report’) documents the findings of a Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) of Muscat College. It comments on Muscat College’s Mission and Vision, and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its systems for achieving that Mission and Vision. Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman’s institutional accreditation process. It is designed to provide a level of assurance to the public about the quality of Muscat College’s activities and constructive feedback to the College to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with Muscat College undertaking a self study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarized in their Quality Audit Portfolio (the ‘Portfolio’). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the due date of 19 October 2011.

The OAAA appointed an external Audit Panel (the ‘Panel’), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the Quality Audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 30 November 2011 to consider Muscat College’s Portfolio. Following this, a representative of the Audit Panel Chairperson and the Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to Muscat College on 28 December 2011 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel’s audit visit.

Prior to the audit visit, the Panel invited submissions from the public about the quality of Muscat College’s activities. No submissions were received.

The audit visit took place over 26-28 February 2012. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 95 people, including governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. They also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

No documents created after 28 February 2012 (being the last day of the audit visit) were taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit.

The Report contains a summary of the Panel’s findings, together with formal Commendations where good practices have been confirmed, Affirmations where Muscat College’s ongoing quality improvement efforts merit support, and Recommendations where there are significant opportunities for improvement not yet being adequately addressed. The Report aims to provide a balanced set of observations, but does not comment on every system in place at Muscat College.

The Panel’s audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAAA Board on 10 September 2012.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No. 54/2010. Its responsibilities include conducting quality audits of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. For further information, visit the OAAA website (http://www.oaaa.gov.om). Full details of the quality audit process are available in OAAA’s HEI Quality Audit Manual (available from http://www.oaaa.gov.om/QAM_2008_FINAL2.pdf).
HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Each OAAA Audit Report is written primarily for the institution being audited. The Report is specifically designed to provide feedback to help that institution better understand its own strengths and opportunities for improvement. The feedback is structured according to nine broad areas of activity and presented as formal Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations, or as informal suggestions, each accompanied with explanatory paragraphs. It is expected that the institution will act upon this feedback as part of its continuous efforts to provide the best possible education to students.

The Report is made public because it also may be of interest to students and potential students, their families, employers, government, other higher education institutions in Oman and abroad, and other audiences. Students, in particular, may find this Report useful because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2, 6 and 7 below). However, prospective students should still undertake their own investigations when deciding which higher education institution will best serve their particular learning needs.

Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman’s two-stage process for institutional accreditation. Its focus is formative (developmental) rather than summative. In other words, although the audit addresses nine areas of activity which are common to all institutions, it does not measure the institution against externally set standards of performance in those nine areas. Instead, it considers how well the institution is attending to those areas in accordance with its own Mission and Vision and in the context of relevant legal regulations. Therefore, Quality Audit recognises that each institution has a unique purpose and profile; it does not directly compare one institution with all the other institutions in Oman.

For these reasons, a Quality Audit does not result in a pass or fail; nor does it provide any sort of grade or score. It should also be noted that the precise number of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations that an institution receives in its Audit Report is not as important as the substance of those conclusions. For example, some Recommendations may focus on critical issues such as assessment of student learning, whereas others may focus on issues such as the maintenance of teaching equipment in classrooms which, while important, is clearly less critical. Therefore, it is neither significant nor appropriate to compare the Audit Reports of different HEIs solely on the numbers of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations.

The second stage in the institutional accreditation process is Standards Assessment. Unlike the Quality Audit, this stage, which will take place about four years after the Quality Audit, does provide a summative assessment against external standards in the same nine areas of activity. It should be noted that Oman also operates a system of accreditation/recognition for academic programs, separately from the institutional accreditation process. For more information on Oman’s System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education please visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

This Report contains a number of references to source evidence considered by the Audit Panel. These references are for the HEI’s benefit in further addressing the issues raised. In most cases this evidence is not in the public domain.
CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report, and are not prioritised. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Executive Summary of Findings

Muscat College is a private higher education institution located in Oman’s capital city of Muscat. The College was established in 1996, and since 2004 it has operated from a purpose built campus in the area of Bausher. The College works in partnership with both the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the University of Stirling (UoS, UK). Through its partnership with SQA, the College offers a range of Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programs in the areas of Business and Accounting, Computing, and Built Environment Engineering. Through its partnership with the UoS, the College offers Honours degree programs in the areas of Business, Accounting and Computing. The awards for these programs are conferred by SQA and UoS respectively. The College also offers a General Foundation Program. In the academic year 2010-2011, the College had around 1800 students supported by approximately 60 faculty and 50 administrative staff. The College is not a “University College” as defined in the Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ROSQA) and is taking steps to remove reference to this term in all its documentation. This is in accordance with its formal status as a “College” as licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education.

The College’s Portfolio was developed through a planned, extended and inclusive process. Effort was made by the College to introduce and employ ADRI (see Appendix B) as the method for this self-study exercise, although the final submission reflects a significant lack of effective use of this methodology. Much of the Portfolio is descriptive, highlighting a general need for the College to engage in systematic evaluation of its performance in different areas. The College did not formally identify either areas of strength or opportunities for improvement in its self-study, but it was nevertheless candid in acknowledging that many of the College’s activities take place on an ad hoc basis rather than systematically. The Portfolio, as a document, was compromised by inaccuracies, internal inconsistencies and poor use of English. It appears likely that the effectiveness of the College’s self-study and the process of producing the Portfolio were undermined by the position of Dean at the College becoming vacant during this exercise.

The College is governed, principally, by its Chairman. At this level, there is strong commitment for the College to serve the development of young Omanis for life and for Omani culture to be a critical component in this development. Appreciation and respect for Omani culture and social responsibility, together with a desire for high quality academic programs, underpin the College’s Mission, Vision and Values.

The College’s governance structure is in a state of transition. Planned changes have the potential to address a current lack of effective separation between governance and management functions and to emphasize the role of quality management. They do not, however, provide for significant breadth of input at governance level as a mechanism by which accountability can be ensured, and the College needs to take action to ensure this deficiency is addressed. Academic management of the College has also been compromised by the lack of a permanent Dean for an extended period (exceeding 14 months at the time of the audit visit), as well as most heads of academic departments operating on an “acting” basis. It is of critical importance that this is addressed by the College in order to fill the current void in academic leadership and management in the College.
The College has a history of setting strategic goals and currently has some elements of a strategic plan in draft form. The absence of a comprehensive, approved strategic plan, however, is fundamentally problematic for the College and has given rise to uncoordinated and ineffectual operational planning across the institution and absence of a mechanism by which institutional performance can be evaluated effectively. Action in these areas is required as a priority. The College has recently developed a suite of policy documents for areas which include risk assessment and financial management. The College now needs to introduce and embed its new risk management system and ensure that financial resources are aligned with strategy and provided for the implementation of plans. The College is in the process of implementing a policy management system. This positive step needs to be accompanied by a robust document management system applicable to all formal documents. Systematic checking and proof reading of these documents is also required to ensure accuracy of both content and language.

The College’s two affiliate relationships are long-standing and College graduates of the programs provided by these partners have the benefit of receiving internationally recognized awards. A process by which these partnerships can be formally monitored and reviewed by the College is nevertheless required to ensure effective implementation of partnership agreements and evaluation of partnership outcomes in relation to strategic intent. In addition, challenges relating to implementation of the different requirements of the two affiliates (for example, regarding academic misconduct) need to be more effectively managed by the College.

The UoS relationship is characterized by robust systems to assure academic standards on its Honours degree programs at the College, although these programs are being undertaken by a limited number (approximately 15% in 2010-2011) of the College’s students. By contrast, implementation of the terms of the SQA affiliation agreement and its associated systems currently lacks rigour. Over 50% of the College’s students were following SQA programs in 2010-2011. The College recognizes that the English language level of students is critical in determining their success on academic programs but it has yet to ensure that its in-house English language testing of students is effectively benchmarked. This is required in order to protect both entry standards to academic programs and defined progression requirements on degree programs. Continued monitoring and evaluation of English language standards in relation to performance on academic programs is also required together with enhanced recording and use of student retention and progression data.

The College makes considerable effort to provide training placements for students although this is not a formal requirement of any of its programs and is done on an ad hoc basis. Systems to monitor and evaluate graduate employment outcomes as well as to engage effectively with alumni, however, have yet to be developed and implemented. Systems for both are overdue. The College does provide some career and employment services and is working to formalize systems for this provision. Enhanced planning and management of relationships with industry and other external stakeholders is required to support these efforts.

The College’s research activity is limited to the efforts of individuals acting on their own initiative, with support from the College being provided on an ad hoc basis. A significant number of academic staff are, however, currently following PhD programs. The College has research aspirations aligned to its Mission and Vision which need to be addressed through formal planning.

Students at the College benefit from supportive academic counseling as well as registry services and library resources that appear to be adequate. The entire College community benefits from strength in provision of information technology (IT) facilities and support. Learning support services, however, are currently limited and ad hoc. These need to be considered within an overarching plan which guides coordinated provision of academic support services in relation to strategic goals, and against which this provision can be evaluated. General student support services also need to be planned in this way. Students clearly have a voice in the College; there are various forums for students to express their views as well as representation through the Student Council. There is, nevertheless, a requirement for more systematic collection, analysis and use of student feedback. A positive and distinctive characteristic of
Muscat College is its program of extracurricular activities and events specifically designed to fulfill the cultural aspect its Mission and Vision and to foster its institutional Values.

The College has significant challenges in relation to staffing. Further work is required to establish reasons for low staff retention and to implement strategies to alleviate this. A number of permanent, senior academic and administrative appointments need to be made. The College is aware that its management of human resources needs to be undertaken more systematically and it is in the process of developing and documenting policies, procedures and guidelines to address this. In particular, there is a need for effective professional development and performance management systems for all staff to be developed and implemented. Significant progress has been made towards establishing a system for promotions and staff incentives. Systematic collection, analysis and use of staff satisfaction data is required to assist in identifying opportunities for improvement which inform planning and decision making.

The College takes pride in maintaining a clean and pleasant working environment for students and staff and has a campus infrastructure development plan which is being progressively implemented. The College’s self-study successfully highlighted its need to transition away from a status characterized by many activities being conducted on an ad hoc basis. Strength in governance and leadership is now required to establish a status whereby comprehensive plans are systematically implemented and evaluated in a cycle which brings about quality improvements.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Muscat College for its provision of programs delivered in affiliation with the University of Stirling for which robust systems for assessment and moderation are implemented. ................................................................. 25
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Muscat College for effectively implementing systems to maintain and continually improve its provision of IT infrastructure and services in line with strategic intent and the needs of the College community. ......................... 36
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Muscat College for its extensive range of extracurricular activities for students which serve to fulfill the cultural aspect of its Mission and Vision and through which the College Values and desired behaviours are fostered in students. ................................................................. 42

Summary of Affirmations

A formal Affirmation recognizes an instance in which Muscat College has accurately identified a significant opportunity for improvement and has demonstrated appropriate commitment to addressing the matter.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that its use of the term “University College” needs to cease and supports action being taken by the College to ensure that all its institutional documentation and promotional materials accurately reflect its formally approved status as a “College” so that this is clearly understood by all stakeholders. ...... 13
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that an effective Quality Assurance function is required in the College and supports the establishment of its Quality Assurance Unit to lead efforts to ensure appropriate systems are developed and implemented in order to achieve this........................................................................................................ 14
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that an effective system of policy management needs to be implemented and supports its ongoing efforts to implement appropriate procedures in order to achieve this. 19

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that plagiarism needs to be addressed effectively across all programs and supports the College’s efforts to achieve this. 24

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that career and employment services need to be provided to students in a systematic manner and supports the recent creation of a specific department to undertake this role. 40

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that promotion and other incentives need to be dealt with clearly and systematically and supports the College’s development of a detailed draft approach to address this. 46

Summary of Recommendations

A Recommendation draws attention to a significant opportunity for improvement that Muscat College has either not yet accurately identified or to which it is not yet adequately attending.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that, as a matter of priority, Muscat College finalise its governance structure, embed it within the College through appropriate dissemination and training, and fully implement it. 13

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish an advisory governing body that includes external independent members, to aid it in setting broad strategy and overseeing operations. 14

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that, as a matter of priority, Muscat College appoint a Dean both to provide academic leadership and to oversee the management of College affairs and that this action is supported by permanent appointments in Head of Department positions where applicable. 15

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a mechanism for effective monitoring and review of its academic partnerships. 16

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that, as a matter of priority, Muscat College develop and implement a comprehensive strategic plan to guide the institution and against which to evaluate institutional performance. 17

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish and implement a comprehensive and uniform approach to operational planning that is fully integrated with its strategic planning. 17

7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College review its financial management and planning processes in relation to developments in governance, strategy, leadership and operational planning, ensuring that financial resources are aligned with strategy and are sufficient for the implementation of plans. 18

8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College act on its intention to introduce its newly developed Risk Management System and ensure that this system is effectively embedded throughout the organization. 18

9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish a robust document management system which is applied, as appropriate, to all formal College documents. 19
10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish a comprehensive system for reviewing outcomes against entity and activity operational plans and strategic objectives and ensure the system is monitored and evaluated within the College’s framework for quality assurance. ................................................................. 20

11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College adopt formal processes for the development, approval and effective use of College graduate attributes and ensure that these attributes reflect appropriate consultation with relevant, local, external stakeholders and can be developed in students alongside those of relevant partner institutions. .................................................................................................................... 22

12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure both that its system of in-house English language assessment is effectively benchmarked and that its stated entry and progression standards for English language are rigorously applied, monitored and reviewed in order to ensure its students are afforded the best possible opportunity to succeed........................................................................................................ 23

13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College enhance its mechanisms for recording and analyzing student retention and progression in order to generate data which can be used systematically to effectively inform improvement strategies in this area .................................................................................................................................. 27

14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a system to monitor and evaluate graduate employment outcomes in order to help ensure that, in accordance with its Mission and Vision, graduates of its programs are meeting the needs of employers and the wider community. .................................................................................. 27

15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop an overarching, comprehensive, industry and community engagement plan in line with its Vision, Mission and strategic goals to guide and coordinate its activities in this area and provide indicators against which performance can be systematically evaluated .................................................... 31

16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College act on its intention to establish a formal relationship with its alumni, ensuring that this is appropriately broad in purpose and is supported through clear directives and adequate resources. ......................................................................................................................... 33

17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop an overarching plan to manage provision of its academic support services which is aligned to the College’s overall planning framework, supported by coordinated policies and procedures, and subject to review based on systematic evaluation of progress and achievements. ............................................................. 34

18. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure that adequate student learning support activities are provided through a formally established system based on a coherent approach .................................................................................................................. 37

19. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement an overarching plan for its different student support services which is aligned to strategic objectives and provides for effective coordination and management of its provision of these services. .............................................................................................................................. 38

20. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College implement a system to ensure that student satisfaction is monitored effectively through the collection of valid data which is used to inform planning and improvement cycles. ...................................................................................... 39

21. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure that its staff recruitment and selection processes are clearly documented and subject to regular evaluation to ensure they are effective in supporting strategic staffing needs of the College being met. ............................................................... 44
22. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a staff development policy and plan, which is reviewed on a regular basis, to promote the professional development of staff and support the College’s strategic goal of increasing staff retention and maintaining quality................................................................. 45

23. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a formal staff performance management system, which is reviewed on a regular basis and linked to the College’s strategic goals and operational plans................................................................. 46

24. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a system which ensures that staff satisfaction is monitored effectively and opportunities for improvement are identified and addressed............................................................................ 47

25. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College formally investigate factors contributing to low staff retention and implement strategies to alleviate this. ................................................................................................................................... 47

26. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop a comprehensive plan for the provision of its general support services which is aligned with strategic objectives and supported by mechanisms for regular and effective evaluation of the various services provided........................................................................................................ 48

27. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure that all formal documents in the public domain contain precise and accurate information and are free from language errors. ........................................................................................................................................ 49
1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Muscat College is a private higher education institution which was established in 1996. It is formally classified as a “College” by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) through which it is licensed to operate. This chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to overall governance and management at the College and specifically covers the following: Mission, Vision and Values; governance; management; strategic plan; operational planning; financial management; risk management; policy management; entity and activity review systems; student grievance process; and health and safety.

1.1 Mission, Vision and Values

Muscat College has a history of setting statements of strategic intent. It reports that these statements have been reviewed and redefined over time, with the process for this becoming increasingly consultative. The broad focus of the statements has remained constant in line with the College’s stated commitment to its main purpose (Portfolio, pp.8-9). Documentation from 2006 and 2008 viewed by the Panel provided evidence of this.

The College’s Vision is:

Muscat College aspires to be an outstanding, academic and cultural institution in Higher Education within and outside Oman (Portfolio, p.8).

Its Mission is:

Muscat College offers quality Higher Education and provides students with the needed knowledge, skills and competencies. Muscat College shall also work [sic] on promoting research activities and anchoring Omani culture (Portfolio, p.8).

The College’s Values are: promoting ethical values (integrity, accountability, professionalism, honesty, openness, objectivity); communicating information effectively and efficiently, enhancing students’ critical thinking ability; and understanding, appreciating and respecting Omani heritage, religion and customs (Portfolio, p.9).

The Panel found these statements to be articulated consistently through College documentation and, through the course of the audit, found the focus on Omani culture in particular to be well embedded in the College and to genuinely inform its activities (see Commendation 3). In relation to this, the College claims to have a specific focus on preparing students for their transition into becoming contributing members of society (Portfolio, p.9). The Panel found strong commitment to this principle from the highest levels in the College and throughout the institution.

The Panel appreciates the efforts of the College to use these statements to guide its activities and to review them periodically, but the Panel found a lack of formal processes to measure awareness of these among the College community and to guide their review and approval. The College is encouraged to consider developing and implementing processes to do this. The final approval of key institutional statements and documents also needs to ensure accuracy in use of language (see Recommendation 27). Existing language errors in the College’s Mission and Values need to be corrected.

College documentation supplied to the OAAA, the College website (during the period of this audit), and College publicity materials, refer to the College as a “University College”. The use of this term is governed by MoHE licensure in line with the Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance (ROSOQA). The Panel was reassured to find that the College is now aware that its use of the term “University College” is not permitted. At the time of the audit visit, steps
were already being taken to revise all College documentation accordingly (see Section 9.2). It is important for this process to be completed without delay so that students and staff in the College, as well as relevant external stakeholders, are not misled regarding the formal status of the College.

**Affirmation 1**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that its use of the term “University College” needs to cease and supports action being taken by the College to ensure that all its institutional documentation and promotional materials accurately reflect its formally approved status as a “College” so that this is clearly understood by all stakeholders.

### 1.2 Governance

The College began a process of revising its governance structures in 2009. This was in order to: redefine and clarify responsibilities; enhance communication; streamline delegation of authority; as well as take account of new departments, such as the Quality Assurance Unit (Portfolio, p.10). The Panel appreciates these intentions, but found that the “current governance structure”, as described in the Portfolio (p.10), has yet to be fully established.

The revised governance structure (Portfolio, p.10) has three senior committees: the Strategic Planning Board, the College Board, and the Academic Council. The Panel found that clarification of some reporting lines within the governance structure is still required. In terms of the senior committees, the Panel noted apparent discrepancies between the structure and the terms of reference provided for the senior committees in the College Charter. On the structure, the Strategic Planning Board is shown as reporting directly to the Chairman. This is consistent with its terms of reference. The College Board is shown as reporting to the Dean and the Academic Council is shown as reporting to the Vice Dean but their respective terms of reference both state that they report to the Chairman. The Panel also noted that three committees (for management and budget; recruitment and employment; and risk and business continuity) are not connected to any other entity. The College states that these committees have been formed to “support the work of the Boards and the Council” (Portfolio, p.12). The Panel learned that these committees had yet to meet and their terms of reference were still under development.

The Panel found that, prior to the audit visit, the Strategic Planning Board had met only once, in December 2011; the College Board had been formed but had never convened; and the Academic Council had last met in November 2011. The College Charter states how frequently these groups should meet, but these requirements have yet to be achieved.

In relation to governance, the College states that “the effectiveness of the current system is yet to be realized as it is still in the early stages of implementation” (Portfolio, p.12). It was clear to the Panel that more work is required to fully establish and implement the revised structure. Meanwhile, governance of the College remains compromised, and action is therefore required as a high priority.

**Recommendation 1**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that, as a matter of priority, Muscat College finalise its governance structure, embed it within the College through appropriate dissemination and training, and fully implement it.

The Panel noted that the College’s governance structure has no entity which provides for independent external input. The Panel considers this to be an omission which compromises
effective governance of the College. It is standard practice, internationally, as well as common practice in Oman, for educational institutions to include a body involving relevant, independent, external experts within their governance structure to assist in guiding the institution in matters of general strategy and institutional oversight.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish an advisory governing body that includes external independent members, to aid it in setting broad strategy and overseeing operations.

The College has established a “Quality Assurance Management System” comprising committees and coordinators within departments and units, and headed by a recently established Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), the head of which reports to the Chairman (Portfolio, p.11). The Panel recognizes the potential that this structure has to support the development and implementation of quality assurance systems in the College and the fact that a comprehensive Quality Management Policy is in place; many systems, however, have yet to be developed and the Quality Management System has yet to realize its potential.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that an effective Quality Assurance function is required in the College and supports the establishment of its Quality Assurance Unit to lead efforts to ensure appropriate systems are developed and implemented in order to achieve this.

1.3 Management

The College states “The Dean is responsible for the overall management and day-to-day function of the College, supported by the College Board and Academic Council” (Portfolio, p.12). Both the College Board and the Academic Council are chaired by the Dean.

The Panel was particularly concerned, however, to find that the post of Dean had become vacant in November 2010 and had yet to be filled. The Panel learned that some months after this position became vacant, the Vice Dean (also identified in College documentation as Vice Dean for Administration and Finance) took up the role of “Acting Dean” in addition to her existing role. At the time of the audit visit, this arrangement had therefore been in place for about a year. The Panel learned that the Vice Dean’s previous experience was not in the field of dealing with academic departments or major academic matters and the Panel found less evidence of the Vice Dean directly engaging in academic affairs than would be expected from this senior role. Overall, the Panel found that, despite admirable effort, the role was being covered in a relatively low profile and largely reactive manner. The Panel was therefore concerned about the lack of academic leadership in the College. The Panel also found that the English Language Centre and two of the three academic departments in the College were being managed by “acting” Heads of Department (HoDs). This reflects staff turnover which has added to a lack of continuity in academic leadership and management at this level. In terms of the management of non-academic departments, the College also has no permanent head of Student Affairs; at the time of the audit visit, this position was being covered by the Director of Marketing and Public Relations.

The College Charter states that the permanent members of the Academic Council are the Dean (as Chairperson), the Vice Dean, and HoDs of academic departments. The Panel noted that the HoD of the English Language Centre, which at the time of the audit visit was catering for more than 25% of the total student population, was not a permanent member of the Academic Council. The
Panel considers that the College may benefit from an Academic Council with a wider membership.

It was clear to the Panel that in the absence of a full-time Dean, significant support for management in the College is being provided by the Chairman. Indeed, the Panel found quite a widespread perception among students that the Chairman was, in fact, the Dean. The Panel found that the on-going requirement for a Dean to be appointed coupled with the existing lack of an effective governance structure (see Recommendation 1) means that, currently, governance and management functions in the College lack distinction.

The Panel considered that the process of producing the Portfolio had been undermined by the position of Dean becoming vacant during this exercise. The College’s self-study evaluation of management in the College was particularly brief, perhaps as a result of this. In this section, the College indicates that it lacks systems to monitor and evaluate both institutional and staff performance (Portfolio, p.13). The Panel agrees with this assessment (also see Recommendation 10 and Recommendation 23).

The Panel was advised that the College had been seeking a suitable candidate to take up the position of Dean but was not able to confirm that substantial steps had been taken. It is critical for the College to make an appropriate appointment as soon as possible in order to provide leadership and management regarding: academic affairs; the implementation of institutional strategy; and the monitoring of institutional performance. In support of effective management of the College, permanent HoD appointments also need to be made in positions currently held on a non-permanent basis.

**Recommendation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that, as a matter of priority, Muscat College appoint a Dean both to provide academic leadership and to oversee the management of College affairs and that this action is supported by permanent appointments in Head of Department positions where applicable.

**1.4 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance**

The College has two long-standing academic affiliation agreements through which it offers its higher education programs. The College’s Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programs are offered through its affiliation with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and its Honours degree programs are offered through its affiliation with the University of Stirling (UoS - Scotland, UK) (Portfolio, p.13). In both cases, awards are conferred by the affiliates, and the programs are therefore subject to the respective academic regulations and quality assurance processes of these institutions. As in other areas of the College’s self-study, this section of the Portfolio was brief and descriptive rather than evaluative.

The Panel, through review of extensive documentation and interviews with staff both inside the College and at the partner institutions, concluded that the relationship with the UoS, which began in 2003, is operating effectively in accordance with the affiliation agreement. There is particular strength in UoS oversight of assessment and academic standards (see Section 2.8) and its detailed annual reporting on the partnership. The Panel also met students who were appreciative of the fact that their UoS degree was recognized internationally as creating eligibility for further study. At present, however, the number of Muscat College students enrolled on UoS programs is relatively low, accounting for approximately 15% of total enrollments in 2011-2012 (Portfolio, pp. 85-86).
Muscat College became a “Certified SQA Centre” in 2001 (Portfolio, p.3) and in 2011-2012 nearly 60% of the College’s students were enrolled on SQA programs (with approximately 25% studying on the General Foundation Program). Whilst there are clearly positive aspects of the SQA partnership, the Panel found a lack of rigour in the implementation of some of the quality assurance arrangements, such as the internal verification of assessments (see Section 2.8) and the regularity of SQA visits to the College. The SQA agreement, which dates from 2001, calls for a minimum of two External Moderation visits and one Systems Verifier Monitoring visit per year. While visits in previous years have typically met or exceeded this requirement, the reduced number of visits in 2011 and 2012 is not in compliance with the existing agreement.

Evidence presented to the Panel confirmed that, as stated in the Portfolio (p.13), the College tries to implement the quality policies and procedures of each affiliate as required for the delivery of their respective programs. Currently, however, the Panel found that where those policies differ, as they do, for example, concerning academic misconduct, there is a lack of clarity in implementation (see Section 2.6). Enhanced academic leadership will help the College to address this (see Recommendation 3).

Muscat College states that it is currently in the process of reviewing its partnership with UoS (Portfolio, p.5). At present, however, the College has no formal processes by which to monitor and evaluate its academic partnerships. The Panel considers these to be required to help ensure that the terms of affiliation agreements are fulfilled, particularly in relation to the quality assurance arrangements, and to ensure that partnerships are effective in supporting the College’s intent to provide “quality Higher Education” in accordance with its Mission.

Recommendation 4
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a mechanism for effective monitoring and review of its academic partnerships.

1.5 Strategic Plan
Information in the Portfolio concerning the status of the College’s Strategic Plan was found to be ambiguous (p.14) and the College’s original submission to the OAAA did not meet the requirement of including a strategic plan. Subsequently, a draft Strategic Plan covering the period 2011-2014 was submitted.

The College Charter describes a structure that includes a Strategic Planning Board and this is shown as part of the College’s current governance structure (Portfolio, p.10). According to the Charter, this board is charged specifically with developing and reviewing the College’s Strategic Plan. At the time of the audit visit, however, the Board had met only once. Minutes of the meeting mention the Strategic Plan but the matter was deferred. The process by which the draft Strategic Plan had been prepared remained unclear to the Panel.

In addition to including the Vision, Mission and Values of the College, the draft Strategic Plan identifies seven College goals. The Panel noted that these seven goals were listed on the College website prior to the audit visit but only three of these were mentioned in the Portfolio. The draft Strategic Plan also includes a SWOT analysis, a list of actions, and titles for action plans. The Panel noted that the College states “As part of its Strategic Plan, the College is currently in the process of reviewing its partnership with the University of Stirling …” (Portfolio, p.5), yet there is no mention of this in the draft Strategic Plan.

Overall, the Panel considers that the present lack of a comprehensive strategic plan is fundamentally problematic to the College and that this has led to weaknesses in other areas identified in this Report. Because of this, action needs to be taken as a priority. The Panel
appreciates the preliminary work that has been done in preparing the draft Strategic Plan and also the stated intent of the College to ensure that strategic planning is an inclusive process (Portfolio, p.14). It is nevertheless apparent that the College is some way from establishing its Strategic Plan and embedding institutional processes for its development and implementation, as well as processes for monitoring progress and achievements in relation to this.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that, as a matter of priority, Muscat College develop and implement a comprehensive strategic plan to guide the institution and against which to evaluate institutional performance.

The Panel notes that the Strategic Plan will need to align with the College budget, to ensure that resources follow strategy (see Recommendation 7).

1.6 Operational Planning

The Panel reviewed a sample of departmental operational plans and discussed operational planning with various members of staff. The Panel recognizes the effort made by departments to formulate goals in line with the College’s Mission and Vision and develop key performance indicators. The lack of an overarching strategic plan and non-alignment between departmental plans, however, renders these plans insufficient to drive institutional operations effectively. The Panel agrees with the College that, as yet, there is no standard approach to operational planning (Portfolio, p.14). In this section of the Portfolio, the College also states that “The current Operational Planning Manual will improve on this area and support the operational planning process.” The College was, however, unable to produce a copy of this manual for scrutiny.

The College needs to have a comprehensive strategic plan in place before it can develop and implement an effective system of operational planning. The current absence of both a fully implemented governance structure and strong academic leadership hinder progress in this area. Addressing the lack of effective operational planning in the College needs to be undertaken alongside attention to these other matters.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish and implement a comprehensive and uniform approach to operational planning that is fully integrated with its strategic planning.

1.7 Financial Management

The College states that its financial planning and management functions are organized by the Director of Finance in coordination with the Vice Dean and consultation with the Chairman (Portfolio, p.15). The College adds that financial planning and management processes have been strengthened by development of a new Finance Manual.

The Panel noted that the new Accounting and Finance Manual is comprehensive and found evidence of its implementation in the day-to-day management of financial operations. In its self-study, however, the College reports almost exclusively on matters of internal accounting. The Accounting and Finance Manual indicates that the primary source of revenue is student fees. The Panel learned that student numbers had declined in 2011-2012 relative to 2010-2011 resulting in challenges in financial management for the College. In view of this, the Panel considers that enhanced review of the College’s financial model and position is required.
The College will need to consider how matters covered in the new Accounting and Finance Manual align with developments in governance, strategy, and planning as current weaknesses in these areas are addressed. Of particular importance is the need to ensure budget alignment with strategic and operational plans.

**Recommendation 7**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College review its financial management and planning processes in relation to developments in governance, strategy, leadership and operational planning, ensuring that financial resources are aligned with strategy and are sufficient for the implementation of plans.

1.8 *Risk Management*

The College states that “… Muscat College has developed and introduced a new Risk Management System …” (Portfolio, p.15). The Panel was unable to find evidence of an actual system although it reviewed the College’s newly developed Enterprise Risk Management Manual. The Panel learned that this had been prepared by an external consultant.

This manual provides a comprehensive, generic, overview of risk management. It also includes 45 specific areas of risk for the College. Risk areas identified by the College (Portfolio, p.15) are covered within the manual: financial risks, socio-cultural risks and compliance risks. In addition, risks have been identified that pertain to areas covered elsewhere in this Report concerning, for example, lack of leadership capacity and continuity of management, and weaknesses in the development and implementation of strategy.

The College states that it “…needs to address risk management and to conduct an institution-wide risk assessment and the implementation of risk registers” (Portfolio, p.15). The Enterprise Risk Management Manual, and the generic risk library contained within it, constitute the beginning of this process.

The Panel was unable to confirm, however, that the new approach was widely known, that those with responsibilities for significant areas had knowledge of the associated risks, or that any significant progress towards the College’s ambition in the area of risk had been made. Effective implementation is now required.

**Recommendation 8**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College act on its intention to introduce its newly developed Risk Management System and ensure that this system is effectively embedded throughout the organization.

1.9 *Policy Management*

The College has established a Policy on Policy Management (Portfolio, p.16). This policy sets out, *inter alia*, mechanisms for the development of new policy, the means by which new policies are approved, and how policies evolve once established. The Panel ascertained, through discussions with College staff, that this approach to policy management is broadly understood within the College. The Panel noted that the College, with the aid of a consultant, has recently developed a range of comprehensive policy and process documents and appreciates the College’s efforts in this area.

The College indicates that weaknesses it has identified in the communication of policies and the consistency of their implementation are to be addressed by the QAU (Portfolio, p.16). The Panel
also found a lack of awareness of some policies among relevant staff but was pleased to learn that the QAU was in the early stages of centralizing some aspects of policy management. The Panel noted, however, that the Policy on Policy Management does not mention the QAU; rather, the policy states “The Director of Human Resources and Administration coordinates the process for creating and revising policies; assists in the drafting of policies; catalogs the current policies; manages college’s policy web pages and links to other pages on the college's web site; and, maintains an archive of old policies.” Any role of the QAU therefore needs to be formalized and the policy updated accordingly.

The Panel recognizes the work undertaken by the College to develop a framework for policy development and management and supports its ongoing efforts to implement an effective system.

Affirmation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that an effective system of policy management needs to be implemented and supports its ongoing efforts to implement appropriate procedures in order to achieve this.

The Panel noted that a large number of College documents are not dated and have no information about, for example, authorship, ownership, responsibilities, or version numbering. The draft Strategic Plan, the Facilities Manual, and the Computer Lab Usage Policy are examples of documents which have none of this information. The Panel found no identification of this as an area of weakness by the College but considers a proper document management system is required to support effective use of College documentation. The Policy on Policy Management needs to be revised to address this in relation to policies.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish a robust document management system which is applied, as appropriate, to all formal College documents.

Whilst the College is addressing enhancing the communication and accessibility of polices through its Policy on Policy Management and action by the QAU, the Panel found no evidence of formal guidelines regarding the provision of staff training to ensure effective implementation of policies, procedures and regulations. The College needs to ensure that this is also addressed in its overall approach to policy management.

1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems

The College, recognizing that review systems are “… essential … for high-performing institutions …” states that these are in place “… to ensure sustainability, academic excellence and viable operational support” (Portfolio, pp.16-17). The Panel was not, however, able to confirm that such review systems were fully in place. The Panel noted the module and review reports generated by academic departments as well as the reports provided by the academic affiliates but did not find evidence of systematic review of non-academic units. The College has yet to establish a system of internal review of departments and units across the College in relation to operational plans and relevant benchmarks. This is required as part of a system by which the College can monitor, evaluate and improve the performance of both individual departments and units as well as the institution itself. The Panel recognizes that effective strategic and operational planning is a pre-requisite for this to be implemented (see Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 6). The College indicates the importance of the QAU and associated committees in this area (Portfolio, p.17), and the Panel appreciates their potential to support desired processes in line with the College’s Quality Management Policy.
Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College establish a comprehensive system for reviewing outcomes against entity and activity operational plans and strategic objectives and ensure the system is monitored and evaluated within the College’s framework for quality assurance.

1.11 Student Grievance Process

The College states that it has a clear policy and procedures for receiving and dealing with student grievances and complaints (Portfolio, p.17). The Panel noted that these are included in the Student Affairs Manual and embedded within the College’s student induction process.

The Panel noted that the Student Affairs Manual states that this policy and the associated procedures are “to be approved by the Steering Committee October 2010”. It also found no evidence of a Student Handbook or Student Manual in which information on relevant general College policies such as this is provided to students. Whilst the Panel found evidence of the process being operational, the College is urged to ensure that its documentation is updated as appropriate and encouraged to provide students with information such as the grievance and complaints procedure in writing within some form of a College Student Handbook (also see Section 7.1).

1.12 Health and Safety

The College indicates that it has a strong commitment to the health and safety of the its community and is active in addressing this area (Portfolio, p.18). The Panel noted the College’s newly-developed, comprehensive Health Safety and Environment (HSE) Management System Manual which includes its HSE Policy. It further noted that the College has appointed an HSE Coordinator who the Panel found has been active in conducting relevant workshops. The Panel recognizes the substantial work that has been done by the College in addressing its commitment to health and safety and found strength in the role being undertaken by the HSE Coordinator. The College has identified that has yet to adopt a proactive approach to evaluation in this area (Portfolio, p.18) but the Panel notes that the College’s HSE Management System Manual details procedures for HSE audits and inspection. The College is encouraged to implement these procedures.

1.13 Oversight of Associated Entities (e.g. owned companies)

Muscat College does not have any Associated Entities.
2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

The College indicates its intent to provide quality learning opportunities to its students that meet current market demands and society’s needs, as called for by its Mission and Vision, and states that “An important goal of Muscat College is to provide good learning and teaching environment to enhance the ability of students to maximize educational prospect [sic]” (Portfolio, p.19). The Panel noted that this goal is included in the College’s draft Strategic Plan, although it pre-dates this.

In pursuit of these intentions, and in affiliation with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the College offers Higher National Certificate (HNC) Programs in Business; Accounting; Computing; and Construction as well as Higher National Diploma (HND) Programs in Business; Accounting; Software Development; Technical Support; Quantity Surveying; Construction; and Management. These HNC and HND programs are equivalent, respectively, to a Certificate (Level 1) and a Diploma (Level 2) on the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF).

Further, in affiliation with the University of Stirling (UoS), the College offers four year Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Science (BSc) with Honours programs. These programs are: BA (Hons) Business Studies; BA (Hons) Accountancy and Business Studies; BA (Hons) Accountancy and Computing Science; and BSc (Hons) Business Computing. There are exit Bachelor awards from UoS at the end of the third year for students who do not progress to the fourth year. These Bachelor Degree awards are equivalent to an Advanced Diploma (Level 3) on the OQF while the Honours degrees are equivalent to a Bachelor Degree (Level 4).

2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives

Graduate attributes for students enrolled on the HNC and HND programs with SQA and the degree programs with UoS are course related and largely determined by the partner institutions.

The College has, nevertheless, identified a set of generic graduate attributes which it aims to ensure are embedded through all courses including its own General Foundation Program. These are: numeracy; communication; problem solving; working with others; information technology; self-management; interpersonal skills; research skills; language proficiency skills; study skills; and real time project implication (Portfolio, p.20). The way in which these attributes were approved and adopted by the College remained unclear to the Panel. Moreover, the mapping information provided (Portfolio, p.20) does not show the attributes of language proficiency skills and study skills being developed in any discipline area.

The Panel noted that UoS has an Industry Board which has input into the development of graduate attributes (Portfolio, p.21). The Panel was concerned, however, about how the needs and expectations of employers in Oman were factored into the various graduate attributes of SQA, UoS and the College. The Panel also perceived a degree of overlap and possible confusion between the graduate attributes identified by the College and the College Values (see Section 1.1).

Overall, the Panel would like to see a more rigorous process for approval, adoption and communication of Muscat College graduate attributes. The process should involve consultation with the academic units of the College as well as key industries and professional organizations in Oman. In developing a set of distinctive Muscat College graduate attributes, the College will also need to ensure these are complementary to those of their partner institutions.
Recommendation 11
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College adopt formal processes for the development, approval and effective use of College graduate attributes and ensure that these attributes reflect appropriate consultation with relevant, local, external stakeholders and can be developed in students alongside those of relevant partner institutions.

2.2 Curriculum
The College states that it has no direct involvement in curriculum design for its HNC/D and Honours degree programs but has the flexibility to make changes with prior approval from the respective affiliates, SQA and UoS (Portfolio, p.21). In accordance with this, the Panel found that UoS actively encourages the use of local case studies and examples to provide a relevant local context for the curriculum and that SQA also allows for this.

Performance in delivery of the UoS curriculum by the College is monitored by the use of Module Review Reports which are completed by College staff for consideration in the UoS Examiners’ meetings. The Panel confirmed that these reports capture specific feedback on curriculum as indicated by the College (Portfolio, p.22). These reports provide a systematic mechanism though which curriculum can be reviewed although the Panel noted there is scope for the College to provide more detailed feedback than demonstrated in the sample of reports it reviewed.

The Panel was unable, however, to find clear documentation or evidence related to systems for review and revision of SQA curricula delivered in Oman, nor information on how changes to curricula by SQA are communicated to the College. The Panel considers that more detailed documentation of these aspects of curriculum would be an enhancement.

2.3 Student Entry Standards
The College has a General Foundation Program (GFP) offered by its English Language Centre (ELC) which serves as preparation for progression into the academic programs. The College states that it follows the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs (Portfolio, pp.23-24). The College offers all four years of its UoS Honours degree programs, but the HNC/HND programs also serve as pathways for advanced standing entry into Year 3 of these.

The College details the entry requirements for academic programs (Portfolio, p.23). For entry to the first year of the Bachelor Honours programs, or HNC/HND programs, an IELTS equivalent score of 5.0 plus a pass in the Oman General Education Diploma is required. For entry of HND graduates into the third year of the Bachelor Honours program an IELTS equivalent of 6.0, plus B grades in the graded units of the first two years of the HND program are required. The College does, however, permit HNC/HND program entry to students with an IELTS equivalent score of between 4.0 and 5.0, on the condition that extra hours of English language tuition are undertaken.

The College’s agreement with UoS states that “progression into year two is dependent upon their having attained on the in-house English Language program an IELTS equivalent of 6.0 with a minimum of 5.0 in each component by the end of year one”. For students who fail to achieve this level, but have passed all the Year 1 modules, there is provision for progression conditional on remedial English language tuition being undertaken. The Panel appreciates the setting of IELTS equivalent scores as progression requirements but was concerned to see scores as low as 2.0 in the in-house writing component of the “Advanced IELTS” course for students in semester three of the 2010-2011 Bachelor Honours programs.

The College runs its own in-house system of English language testing and the Panel was concerned that the in-house tests used have not been thoroughly benchmarked for equivalence with IELTS tests. The Panel was advised that some students, on a sample basis, are sent by the
College for official IELTS testing but the Panel heard varied reports of the differences between the in-house test scores and the official IELTS test scores for students double tested in this way. The Panel considers that a more thorough benchmarking of the internal English language placement test against IELTS is required in order for the College to ensure stated entry and progression requirements for English Language are met.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure both that its system of in-house English language assessment is effectively benchmarked and that its stated entry and progression standards for English language are rigorously applied, monitored and reviewed in order to ensure its students are afforded the best possible opportunity to succeed.

The College reports that it has taken “effective steps for establishing a link between the entry standards and students’ performance in the academic programs” and that a study conducted for the Honours degree students found that “having an appropriate IELTS score does not always guarantee a good GPA in the academic program” (Portfolio, p.25). The Panel learned, however, that this was a one-off study and considers that more work is required in this area. In relation to international norms, the Panel had an overarching concern about whether an IELTS equivalent of 5.0 would, in fact, be sufficient preparation for higher education programs taught in English. The Panel noted that this level aligns with the minimum national standard for GFPs but, nevertheless, considers it important for the College to engage in more rigorous monitoring and analysis of English language entry standards, and students’ subsequent development of English language skills, in relation to the English language demands of its different academic programs and students’ performance.

2.4 Foundation Program

The College reports that its ELC offers a three level GFP which follows the national standards for these programs (Portfolio, pp.23-24). In accordance with the standards, the GFP includes Mathematics and Information Technology as well as English Language. In 2011-2012, approximately 25% of the total College student population were enrolled on this program (Portfolio, pp.85,86). The College indicates that it has now reduced the number of intakes to this program to three annually, down from a previous six intakes (Portfolio, p.47).

At the end of level three, GFP students take an in-house IELTS equivalent test to ascertain their readiness for the academic programs. As noted in the previous section, the Panel had concerns about the equivalence of the in-house test to IELTS in assessing the preparedness in English language of students proceeding to the academic programs (see Recommendation 12).

2.5 Teaching Quality

The College states that it has a “well structured institution-wide pedagogic framework” and that it is “unique and specific to the specialization and affiliations” (Portfolio, p.25). The Panel was unable, however, to find any documentary evidence of such a framework, or awareness of its existence amongst teaching staff.

The College indicates that lecturers are inducted on teaching methodology through their induction, meetings and mentoring (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel noted that the Staff Induction Policy includes a comprehensive “additional induction to academic staff” and that the College also has a Lecturers’ Manual of Good Practice in Teaching and Learning. The Panel heard, however, that in practice, rather than undergoing a formal teaching-specific induction, new members of staff seek less formally structured support from their peers. The College reports that the use of teaching portfolios by staff is inconsistent (Portfolio, p.26).
The College states that the quality of teaching is monitored by the Dean, HoDs and the Director of Quality Assurance (Portfolio, p.47) and describes mechanisms for evaluating teaching which include peer review and student feedback (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel learned that the current Acting Dean delegates monitoring of teaching quality to the HoDs and the Quality Assurance Unit does not have a system in place for monitoring teaching quality at this time. The Panel found evidence of peer-review taking pace in departments but learnt that the system was inconsistently implemented.

The Panel found mechanisms in operation for collecting feedback on teaching from students on all programs but was unable to find clear evidence that this consistently and systematically informs improvements.

The Panel appreciates that the College employs a range of processes to support, monitor and evaluate teaching. The College needs to ensure that these are implemented more consistently in order to be effective in enhancing the quality of teaching.

2.6 Plagiarism

Students enrolled on SQA and UoS programs are subject to the academic policies of these institutions, including those relating to academic integrity and plagiarism. Compliance at the College with the relevant UoS policies appears strong, supported by good arrangements for communication between the affiliates. The Panel found the implementation of the UoS policies at the College to be quite thorough. The Panel noted that a significant reduction in reports of plagiarism as a result of the increased use of Turnitin™ software at the College had been formally reported by the UoS Program Director.

In contrast, the College states that there are no clear plagiarism policies and procedures defined by SQA for the HNC/D programs (Portfolio, p.28). The College states that cheating and plagiarism on the HDC/D programs are detected and penalized in the same way as for the degree programs (Portfolio, p.33). The Panel found that some SQA students are subjected to the UoS plagiarism policy and others appear not to be subject to any policy. Additionally, Turnitin™ does not appear to be used on the SQA HNC/D programs. The Panel noted a Muscat College SQA brochure which clearly outlines definitions and penalties for academic dishonesty but remained unclear as to the status of this document. The Panel concluded that the College receives insufficiently clear guidance about managing plagiarism and academic misconduct from SQA for students enrolled on HNC/D programs. This is a matter that the College will need to pursue with SQA in its efforts to ensure that all students at the College receive effective training and advice about plagiarism and academic misconduct, and that appropriate management of cases occurs.

In its self-study, the College identified that the ELC had no policies and procedures in place on plagiarism, although the GFP covers the development of skills relating to academic integrity. The College recognizes the need to address this (Portfolio, p.28). A comprehensive 2008-2009 report produced by the Built Environment Engineering Department on plagiarism provided evidence of concerted effort in this department to manage plagiarism on both UoS and SQA programs. The Panel recognizes and supports the College’s efforts in this area.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that plagiarism needs to be addressed effectively across all programs and supports the College’s efforts to achieve this.
2.7 Student Placements

The College identifies that the curricula for the UoS and SQA programs do not include any requirement for student placements in industry. The College states that, nevertheless, it has a long history of providing student placement services (Portfolio, p.28). The Panel learnt that, with the intention of improving the employment prospects and work readiness of students, the College has been running a student placement initiative for about six years. This has been undertaken by the Training Director from within the Department of Marketing and Public Relations. The Panel heard that the number of students undertaking placements annually had increased from an initial 77 to a recent figure of approximately 200. The Panel recognises the value of these efforts although the placements themselves are not formally structured, monitored or evaluated. The Panel found placements to have been well received by students who undertook these and would encourage the College to organize future placements more systematically.

The Panel learnt that the Training Manager now serves as a contact point for employers looking for graduate employees as well as students for placement. Records of placements and outcomes are maintained. The Panel observed that activity in this area, however, is significantly dependent on the initiative and personal contacts of the Training Manager. The College acknowledges that its services to provide students with training opportunities or employment are, currently, carried out on an *ad hoc* basis (Portfolio, p.43). Enhanced planning and management of its relationship with industry and employers will support the College’s efforts in this area (see Recommendation 15).

2.8 Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation

The College states that Honours degree students are examined and assessed in accordance with the examination procedures, academic standards, grade criteria, grading scheme and assessment methods of UoS (Portfolio, p.29).

The Panel noted the robust policies, procedures and processes provided through the College’s affiliation with UoS for managing assessment on the Honours programs. These procedures are documented in the Muscat College Bachelor with Honours Degree Quality Manual which is, effectively, a student manual. UoS quality assurance systems for assessment include: double marking and verification of selected papers; external examiners; module review reports that are completed by College staff for consideration in the Examiners’ meetings; and a well documented appeals process.

Within the relevant documentation, the Panel noted evidence of verification of assessment tasks by UoS which allows for the development of appropriately contextualised assessments. The College has developed a policy on double marking which applies to Honours students, although the most recent version of this needs to be identified clearly (see Recommendation 9). The Panel found strong evidence of standards being monitored effectively by UoS systems.

The Panel considers that the College derives great benefit from its affiliation with UoS through its implementation of the University’s robust systems for assessment and moderation on its Honours degree programs.

Commendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Muscat College for its provision of programs delivered in affiliation with the University of Stirling for which robust systems for assessment and moderation are implemented.

For the HNC/D programs, the College is responsible for developing and marking assessments and transferring the final results and grades to SQA. The College states that this is quality assured by
the College through its internal moderation processes and procedures and by SQA through its processes of external moderation, system verification and quality assurance procedures (Portfolio, p.31). The Panel, however, had some concerns about the implementation of these processes. The internal verification system includes formally identified Assessors who are responsible for assessment instrument design and Internal Verifiers responsible for pre-moderation of assessment items before they are used. Although the College reported that training is provided to those undertaking these roles (Portfolio, p.32), the Panel found that this is undocumented and does not take place formally and systematically. The Panel also noted that visits by the external moderators and external system verifiers have been irregular in relation to the affiliation agreement, as indicated in Section 1.4.

The Panel found a number of positive aspects regarding assessment on the HNC/D programs including students’ appreciation of assignments being returned quite quickly and with good feedback; periodic analysis of results conducted by the Departmental Quality Subcommittees; and evidence of an effective grade appeals process. Overall, however, the Panel concluded that the quality assurance processes governing assessment on the College’s SQA programs lack rigour in implementation. There is also lack of a clear system to deal with academic malpractice on the College’s HNC/D programs (see Section 2.6). Effective evaluation of affiliate relationships would assist the College in identifying opportunities for improvement (see Recommendation 4 and Recommendation 10). The College may also benefit from having systems and procedures governing assessment methods, standards and moderation on HNC/D programs detailed within a single document or a coordinated suite of documents.

2.9 Academic Security and Invigilation

The College indicates that academic security and invigilation are maintained in accordance with the requirements of its affiliate partners and that detailed procedures exist regarding invigilation on all programs (Portfolio, p.34).

The College has an Examination Committee which is responsible for the administration, reporting and continuing development of the College examination system. The College has also developed a Final Examination Regulations & Procedures document which contains detailed sections on the arrangements for examinations, including invigilation, for all courses taught at the College. The Panel met relevant staff well versed in these arrangements as well as in dealing with examination papers sent to the College from UoS. The Panel also heard that examination rooms are equipped with cameras to enhance the quality of invigilation.

The Panel found that the arrangements for examination security and invigilation at the College to be well developed. Effective monitoring and evaluation will help to ensure that good practice which exists in this area is maintained.

2.10 Student Retention and Progression

In its self-study, the College presents information on student retention and progression in the Honours programs (Portfolio, pp.35,36) and the Panel also examined pass rates in the HND programs. The College did not report on progression from year three to year four in the Honours programs, but the Panel noted that retention into both the third year and the fourth year appears low. The College indicates that personal and financial issues impact on students’ progression into the third year and it notes that entry to the fourth year is not automatic, and is governed by UoS progression policies (Portfolio, p.36). The Panel noted that UoS Annual Reports include a comparative analysis of student progression in Muscat and Stirling and in 2009-2010 the importance of close monitoring in this area was reported.

The Panel found the data reported by the College difficult to interpret and considers that the College needs to clarify its definitions of progression and retention, as a time series of
enrollments is not the same thing as progression rates. The data shows evidence of very uneven pass rates in the first year of the four Honours programs (Portfolio, p.35). The sample HND program Analysis of Results Reports examined by the Panel also revealed considerable variation in pass rates between units. Without information on the actual numbers enrolled in these units, the use of percentages can be misleading, and may be a contributing factor in the apparent variation. The reports were also purely descriptive, with no real attempt to analyse the data and draw possible conclusions about what the data indicates. Once again, the Panel was of the opinion that the College needs to refine its definitions of these student performance indicators.

Overall, the Panel concluded that, while some attempts are being made by the College to collect student retention and progression data, greater analysis and use of this is required to inform development of strategies to improve retention and progression.

**Recommendation 13**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College enhance its mechanisms for recording and analyzing student retention and progression in order to generate data which can be used systematically to effectively inform improvement strategies in this area.

**2.11 Graduate Destinations and Employability**

The College states that one of its aims is “to ensure that our graduates have the competence, relevant skills and academic background to set them for their employment and career goals” (Portfolio, p.37). The Panel noted that this aligns directly with the College’s Mission. The College’s self-study concluded, however, that “Since there is no system that follows up with graduates, the data available regarding the relationship with the employers and trainers is incomplete” (Portfolio, p.37).

The College identifies its lack of a central database for details and destinations of graduates as a limitation in this area (Portfolio, p.37). The College is considering acquisition of a centralized student information and management system with the potential to address this. The Panel observed that the proposal for this system has the option for an Alumni Management module but was not able to confirm that the system, together with this module, will actually be implemented.

The College does have some data on students who have undertaken training in specific organizations and then proceeded to take up employment in these places (see Section 2.7). The Panel also met a number of graduates who reported that they felt well prepared for their roles in the workplace and who are enjoying success in their chosen fields. In the absence of any sort of detailed information on graduate destinations, however, it is clearly difficult for the College to evaluate its success in this area. As the College states, it has been graduating students for eleven years (Portfolio, p.45). In view of this, effective evaluation of student destinations and employability is overdue, and the Panel urges the College to act on intentions to remedy this.

**Recommendation 14**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a system to monitor and evaluate graduate employment outcomes in order to help ensure that, in accordance with its Mission and Vision, graduates of its programs are meeting the needs of employers and the wider community.
3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMS

This section is not reported on as the College offers no higher degrees or research programs.
4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

The Quality Audit process recognizes that the extent to which a higher education institution will be engaged in research depends on its classification and Mission. The Panel confirmed that Muscat College is to discontinue its use of the term “University College” as it does not meet the national criteria for this classification and is licensed as a “College” (see Affirmation 1). The College is therefore not required to engage in the level of research required by a University College as defined in ROSQA (see Appendix B). The College also acknowledges that it is “basically a teaching institution” (Portfolio, p.38). The College’s Mission, however, states that “Muscat College shall also works [sic] on promoting research activities” (Portfolio, p.8).

These factors guided the Panel’s consideration of the College’s self-study in this area which covers: research planning and management; research performance; research funding schemes; consultancy activities; ethics and biosafety; intellectual property; professional development for research; research commercialisation; and research-teaching nexus.

4.1 Research Planning and Management

The College indicates that it is keen on promoting research activities among academic staff but states that it has no formal research policy and guidelines relating to staff research and consultancy (Portfolio, p.38). The Panel noted that the College’s Lecturer’s Manual of Good Practice in Teaching and Learning lists “Carry out research in your subject area” as a responsibility of academic staff and that the College has staff members undertaking PhDs and others who are research active. Overall, however, staff research, as well as various forms of support for this provided by the College, are not systematically planned and managed.

The College’s draft Strategic Plan includes a goal to “develop the research studies unit” although at this stage the plan does not include any details relating to this. The Panel heard something of the College’s aspirations in this area, but the College did not report on the proposed unit in its self-study.

It was clear to the Panel that there is a need for the College to plan all aspects of research (and consultancy) that it wishes to engage in to fulfil its Mission and move towards its Vision. This planning process needs to be fully developed at both strategic and operational levels, ensuring that resource requirements are effectively addressed (also see Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 6).

4.2 Research Performance

The College states that research performed by staff is done on an ad-hoc basis (Portfolio, p.40) and the Panel confirmed this. Evidence examined by the Panel indicates that most research output to date has been in the form of conference presentations rather than journal publications.

4.3 Research Funding Schemes

The College indicates that although staff research is carried out on an ad hoc basis, institutional support is provided through, for example, funding for travel, conference fees and paid leave to attend local and international conferences (Portfolio, p.40). The Panel found evidence of this occurring in support of individuals and being dealt with on a case by case basis. The Panel learned that, at present, the College has no specific budget for supporting staff research activities; rather this is included under the Staff Welfare budget. The College states that departments are asked to identify research needs in their annual planning (Portfolio, p.40), but the Panel did not find evidence of this in the 2010-2011 sample plan they examined.
4.4 **Consultancy Activities**

The College states that it has no history of any staff consultancy activity but notes that in relation to its Mission there is scope for it to develop consultancy services (Portfolio, p.40). The Panel noted that the College’s draft Strategic Plan includes a goal of developing a research unit and that its new Accounting and Finance Manual addresses College provision of research and consultancy services. The Panel encourages the College to pursue its aspirations in this area through comprehensive planning.

4.5 **Ethics and Biosafety**

The College identifies this area as being not applicable to the College (Portfolio, p.40). The Panel found no evidence to suggest that the College has a need to consider biosafety but notes that the College needs to reassure itself that any research it supports or sponsors which involves human subjects conforms to internationally accepted norms regarding research ethics.

4.6 **Intellectual Property**

The College indicates that all students are effectively inducted on intellectual property rights and copyright law and also that access to course materials is restricted such that modifications can only be made with the permission of the intellectual property owner (Portfolio, p.41). The Panel noted that this area is covered in the College’s academic affiliation agreement with UoS. The College is encouraged to consider its own requirement for an intellectual property policy alongside its development of staff research and consultancy activities.

4.7 **Professional Development for Research**

The College claims to provide a number of opportunities for professional development for research, including: in-house seminars/workshops/presentations; guest lecturers; and support for staff to take part in national and international conferences (Portfolio, p.41). The Panel, however, found in-house activities to be limited both in number and in being directed towards building research capability. As indicated above, support for professional development for research is not systematic and has no dedicated budget (as is the case for professional development in other areas – see Section 8.5). There is scope for the College to enhance staff professional development specifically in relation to research within an overarching plan for all staff development (see Recommendation 22).

4.8 **Research Commercialisation**

The College states that, currently, it does not engage in any research commercialisation (Portfolio, p.41). The Panel suggests that this area be considered appropriately as plans for the establishment of a research and consultancy unit are developed.

4.9 **Research – Teaching Nexus**

The College did not explicitly address any link between its teaching activities and its research and scholarship activities in its self-study, but notes that faculty are encouraged to engage in research and professional development activities to enhance their skills and competencies (Portfolio, p.42). The Panel encourages the College to conduct a more focused evaluation in this area in order to identify opportunities for improvement.
5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The College’s Mission statement states: “The College offers quality Higher Education and provides students with the needed knowledge, skills and competencies. Muscat College shall also works [sic] on promoting research activities and anchoring Omani culture” (Portfolio, p.8). In relation to this, this chapter considers the College’s activities in the area of industry and community engagement resulting from its relationships with industry, employers, professions and other higher education providers, alumni and the community at large.

5.1 Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management

The College indicates that it has significant engagement with industry and the community but acknowledges that this does not take place systematically. The College explains that there is “no ownership, strategy or plan in place” and that activities in this area result from the efforts of individual staff. The College indicates that, as a result, the impact of these activities has not been evaluated (Portfolio, p.43). The Panel agrees that the College has no overarching plan for industry and community engagement. The commentary in the Portfolio is, however, unclear and in apparent contradiction with evidence noted by the Panel that the College’s engagement with the community at large is, to some extent, planned and subject to evaluation (also see Section 5.6). There is, nevertheless, a need for effective planning and management of the other areas considered in this chapter, within which the College’s planning for engagement with the community at large can be accommodated.

Recommendation 15

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop an overarching, comprehensive, industry and community engagement plan in line with its Vision, Mission and strategic goals to guide and coordinate its activities in this area and provide indicators against which performance can be systematically evaluated.

5.2 Relationships with Industry and Employers

The College states that it has built some relationships with ministries, companies and educational institutions through its services to assist students in securing training or job placements but notes that these services are provided on an ad hoc basis by the Training Office and not subject to evaluation (Portfolio, p.43). The College also indicates that some site visits are conducted for students in relation to their programs but that this activity could be enhanced. The Panel was able to verify activities taking place as described by the College. The lack of formal systems in this area was something confirmed by industry representatives and employers during interviews. In particular, a lack of systematic liaison and opportunities to provide feedback to the College were identified by these stakeholders.

The Panel noted that the Training Office is not specifically identified on the College’s organisational structure and was advised that it operates from within the Department of Marketing and Public Relations. The Panel was advised that this office is to become part of the College’s newly created Careers and Alumni Services Office. In addition to addressing the requirements for effective planning and evaluation in this area (through acting on Recommendation 15), the College will need to ensure that roles, responsibilities and reporting lines of departments and individuals involved are clearly defined.
5.3 Relationships with Professions

The UoS BA (Hons) Accounting and Business Studies and BA (Hons) Accounting and Computer Science programs delivered by the College are recognised by three UK professional bodies: the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA); the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW); and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of in Ireland (ICAI) (Portfolio, pp. 43-44). The Panel also examined documentation from the ACCA showing that College graduates of these programs are granted exemption from six of the 14 ACCA qualification papers. The College states that it is pursuing ACCA exemptions for its HND Accounting graduates (Portfolio, p.44).

The Panel encourages the College to be pro-active in exploring relationships with professional bodies in relation to other relevant disciplines, and in evaluating the value that such relationships provide to staff, students and the College as a whole.

5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers

In addition to its academic relationships with UoS and SQA, the College indicates that it has a history of maintaining effective relationships with local higher education providers (Portfolio, p.44). The Panel found examples of formal collaboration activities such as a College faculty member undertaking a teaching assignment for a university in Oman in 2008 and the College agreeing to pilot English language teaching materials for another university in 2010. The extent of these kinds of activities, however, appeared to the Panel to be limited. The College states that it also engages collaborative seminars, conferences and workshops and in informal collaborative activities through sports and cultural events (Portfolio, p.45).

The College indicates that it considers the establishment of relationships with other education providers to be important (Portfolio, p.44). In view of this, the overall purpose of such relationships needs to be specified and related activities need to be planned, monitored, and evaluated (see Recommendation 15).

5.5 Relationships with Alumni

The College reports that basic graduate information is kept with the Admissions and Registration Office and that the Marketing Department has now developed an MS Excel database to include more details of graduates such as their e-mail addresses and place of work. The College also states that its engagement with alumni has been limited to one activity organised by the Marketing Department (Portfolio, p.45). Whilst it is clear that the College’s relationship with its alumni is underdeveloped, the Panel met alumni of both UoS and HND programs who reported keeping in touch with the College informally and participating in College activities.

The College states that it recognises the importance of developing an effective relationship with its alumni and that it has recently created a Career and Alumni Services Office to address this (Portfolio, p.45). The Panel found that this entity is still, effectively, in the process of being established and that its focus appears to be primarily on employment and career guidance (see Section 7.5). This scope of this part of the Quality Audit however, as defined in the OAAA Quality Audit Manual, goes beyond career guidance, and the Panel found limited evidence of consideration of broader potential aspects of alumni engagement.

The Panel concluded that action in this area is overdue and that although some steps have been taken, significant work is still required in order for the College to establish an effective relationship with its alumni.
Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College act on its intention to establish a formal relationship with its alumni, ensuring that this is appropriately broad in purpose and is supported through clear directives and adequate resources.

5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large

The College states that its community engagement activities are driven by its Mission, Vision, Objectives and Values (Portfolio, p.45). The Panel noted that the College’s focus on its relationship with the community has been retained through the evolution of its strategic objectives. The goal to “enhance and maintain effective partnership with the local community” identified in the draft Strategic Plan for 2011-2014 pre-dates this plan.

The College identifies examples of various ways that it engages with the community, including: provision of student scholarships; provision of campus facilities (free of charge) to the community; planning community events; and distributing donations. The College states that these activities are not part of an annual plan and not subject to formal evaluation (Portfolio, p.45). In contradiction with this statement, however, the Panel noted that a number of activities involving the community were in fact both planned and, to some extent, evaluated though the Student Affairs and General Activities Annual Plan (see Section 7.10).

The College has formally identified community engagement as a strength in its draft Strategic Plan and the Panel agrees that there is strength in this area. Full development of the Strategic Plan will allow the College to develop detailed objectives, relating to its strategic goal in this area, to guide its activities and against which to evaluate its performance.
6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The College’s draft Strategic Plan 2011-2014 includes a goal to “Provide good learning and teaching environment [sic] to enhance the ability of students to maximize educational prospect [sic]”. This goal, in essence, pre-dates this plan. The provision of effective academic support services is central to the achievement of this goal. This chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to the College’s provision of academic support services and specifically addresses the Registry; the Library; IT facilities; academic advising; learning support for students; and teaching resources.

6.1 Academic Support Services Planning & Management

The College reports that it has a central committee for planning and managing academic services, chaired by the Dean (Portfolio, p.46). This Committee, however, does not appear on the organizational chart and further investigation by the Panel revealed that this function was actually performed by the Central Quality Committee (CQC). The Panel found that CQC has not met formally since the departure of the Dean in November 2010 although there is evidence of academic support services matters being discussed at earlier CQC meetings.

The College does not have an overall plan for managing academic services, although the Panel found evidence of operational planning by departments as well as departments generating annual Resource Planning reports, as described by the College (Portfolio, p.46). An analysis of sample operational plans showed these to include goals, objectives, strategies, indicators and measures/targets, but to lack alignment with each other. Further, the Panel found no evidence of evaluation of these in relation to progress and achievements. The College states that it revises its academic support policies based on student feedback, surveys and meetings between staff and students (Portfolio, p. 46). The Panel found no specific evidence of policy revision, but noted examples of student feedback being taken into account by units providing services (see Sections 6.3 and 6.4).

The Panel recognizes the College’s efforts in planning and managing its academic support services but considers that a more comprehensive approach, which ensures co-ordination of planning between departments, is required to ensure achievement of the College’s strategic goal in this area. This plan needs to be supported by aligned policies and procedures as well as robust feedback mechanisms to indicate where improvements can be made.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop an overarching plan to manage provision of its academic support services which is aligned to the College’s overall planning framework, supported by coordinated policies and procedures, and subject to review based on systematic evaluation of progress and achievements.

6.2 Registry (Enrollment and Student Records)

The Admissions and Registration Office is responsible for registry services at the College. The major roles of this office, as reported by the College, are: admission of students; maintenance of records; monitoring of student results; and tracking student progression (Portfolio, p.47).

All admissions and registrations are done through the College’s customized “ProMIS” system. The Panel had the opportunity to view the system, which appears to be robust in maintaining student records. The ProMIS system calculates the Grade Point Average (GPA) for each student at the end of every term and assigns overall academic performance indicators (Excellent, Very
Good, etc.) based on the GPA. This data is used by Academic Advisors to monitor student performance (see Section 6.5). The Panel learned that the ProMIS system is backed up on a regular basis (daily, weekly and monthly). All physical student records are maintained in a separate room although the Panel noted that rigorous measures for the security of these (e.g. fire proof filing cabinets) have not been implemented.

Overall, it appeared to the Panel that the Admissions and Registration Office works effectively on a day-to-day basis. Enhanced planning and systematic evaluation (in line with Recommendation 17) will assist in ensuring continuation of this.

6.3 Library

The College states that its Library, which is led by a qualified librarian and provides learning resources in the form of textbooks, reference books and online access to journals, has been subject to systematic enhancement efforts (Portfolio, p.48). The Panel found that the Library also appears to be effectively supported by use of the ProMIS software.

Library collection data shows that the number of books has increased significantly between 2007 and 2010 (Portfolio, p.49), although the number of titles has not risen proportionally. The Panel learned that this is partly the result of multiple copies of the same book being procured in response to student demands. The Panel heard that the Library budget is increased by a fixed percentage each year. The College found evidence of the Library staff being proactive in working with academic staff to identify resources required to support program delivery, as indicated by the College (Portfolio, p.49). The College claims that the Library “has sufficient number of books relating to each unit” (Portfolio, p.51), but the Panel was unable to confirm this. The Library also provides an e-brary service which the Panel observed being utilized by students during the audit visit. The Panel noted that the Library also maintains a collection of Arabic books to help promote Omani history and culture in support of its Mission and Vision.

The College reports that, in addition to providing induction and support for students, specific effort is being made by the Library to encourage students to utilize library resources frequently and effectively (Portfolio, p.48 and p.51). The Panel supports this intention, as College data indicates that, at present, use of the library collection is limited.

The Panel was encouraged to see some evidence of formal evaluation of library provision being undertaken. The Panel viewed the summary report of the 2010 Library satisfaction survey, which shows high satisfaction rates with the Library resources and services, although the number of respondents appeared relatively small. Although the Panel did not find evidence of documented action points for improvements derived from the survey results, there was some evidence that the number of printers in the Library had been increased and the timings had been changed in response to student feedback. It was unclear whether the survey was administered in 2011. The Panel noted that Library documents (such as the Library Regulations and the Library Policies and Circulation Services) need to include appropriate “document management” information (see Recommendation 9).

Overall, the Panel believes that the Library is performing satisfactorily on a day-to-day basis but encourages the College to develop a more proactive long term approach to the development of Library resources through enhanced planning and management (see Recommendation 17).

6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

The College “strives to provide an efficient and productive IT environment to all its users” which is monitored through “periodic survey reports, academic advisory meetings and student staff meetings” (Portfolio, p. 52). The Panel viewed a Computer Lab Usage Policy and a draft Internet and E-mail Policy as well as the operational plan for this unit.
The Panel also viewed the IT facilities at the College and found evidence of these functioning effectively, supported by an enthusiastic team of four qualified IT staff members. The College reports “considerable improvement” in the number of computers in 2009-2010 as compared to previous years (Portfolio, p.52) and the Panel found that the number of computers and computer labs had also increased significantly between the 2009-2010 academic year and the time of the audit visit. The Panel noted that IT services at the College include the provision of WebCT (an online virtual learning environment) to UoS students and wireless connectivity in the Library and student rest areas.

The College reports that IT requirements are systematically planned taking into account user feedback and utilisation data (Portfolio, p.53). The Panel found that, following management approval, the IT unit purchases items requested by individual academic departments. These items are identified in departmental annual resource reports and relate to curriculum requirements. In addition to the annual resource reports, it considers minutes of student-staff meetings which contain feedback from students about the IT facilities. The Panel also viewed the College’s Internet Usage Survey, which is used to collect feedback about the Internet service and monitor the bandwidth performance.

The Panel found that IT equipment is maintained on a regular basis. Further, although there is no formal replacement policy for equipment, the computers had been recently replaced. The Panel found there to be effective back up systems in place (with daily, weekly and monthly back-ups) and a secure network infrastructure, with a new firewall being acquired.

Overall, the Panel found considerable strength in the systems in place to ensure that information and learning technology services at the College meet stated needs: these services are systematically planned, effectively implemented, evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative data, and show evidence of undergoing continued improvement.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Muscat College for effectively implementing systems to maintain and continually improve its provision of IT infrastructure and services in line with strategic intent and the needs of the College community.

6.5 Academic Advising

The College states that it is committed to “provide personalized academic support to its students through academic staff members (who also act as academic advisors),” (Portfolio, p.53) and indicates that academic advisors are responsible for providing academic guidance, registering students for courses, and motivating students to progress. The Panel examined an Academic Advising Policy but its status was unclear regarding formal approval and implementation.

The Panel met with a number of academic staff members who had a dual advisory role, and also viewed the ProMIS system (see Section 6.2) used to monitor students’ progress. The College reports that it encourages regular group and individual meetings of which records are kept (Portfolio, p.53). Minutes provided evidence of regular group meetings, with information about academic regulations, including attendance and progression requirements, being provided by advisors. The Panel found that academic advising sessions for individual students are scheduled on an ad hoc basis, and usually at the request of the student. The Panel heard that students approach their academic advisor in the first instance if they face any difficulties, academic or non-academic. The Panel met students who were highly appreciative of the support provided.
The College states that new academic advisors are guided by senior faculty members to undertake this role rather than being provided with any formal training (Portfolio, p. 53) although the Panel noted that the College’s comprehensive staff induction process covers this area. The Panel found no evidence of systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the academic advising process, and its impact on student progression but noted that the Academic Advising Policy calls for student feedback to be formally reported on annually.

Further development of the academic advising process at the College is required and the Panel encourages the College to build on current positive practices in this area to ensure a robust system.

### 6.6 Student Learning Support

The College claims that it offers “a range of extra-curricular services to ensure that its students are appropriately assisted […] in their learning efforts” (Portfolio, p. 54). It indicates that Student Services (within the Student Affairs Department) is responsible for the design of relevant extracurricular activities to support student learning (Portfolio, p. 54) but the Panel found very limited evidence of these taking place.

The College states that academic staff members also identify weak students and provide them with “extra support classes” (Portfolio, p. 55). The Panel found that this is done on an ad hoc basis. In addition, the College describes peer-tutoring practices but the Panel found that these are not formalized or documented. The Panel learned that the ELC had recently established a Self-Access Centre but at the time of the audit visit, it had not formally opened. The Panel also heard mention of an English Club, open to all students, having been started recently.

At present the College’s student learning support activities are not guided by a clear overall approach, and the support provided is informal and limited. The Panel considers that an effective learning support system is critical for many learners and that it is important for the College to further develop and formalize its work in this area is order to ensure provision of this.

**Recommendation 18**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure that adequate student learning support activities are provided through a formally established system based on a coherent approach.

### 6.7 Teaching Resources

The College states that it ensures the provision of “up-to-date teaching resources so as to optimize the learning experience” (Portfolio, p. 55) and describes all classrooms and computer labs as being equipped with modern teaching facilities and IT equipment, including projectors.

The College indicates that resources are planned based on projected student intake and are informed by academic advisor and student-staff meetings. The Panel found that this is implemented through requests for resources being made by departments through annual Resource Planning reports.

The Panel did not explore this area in depth but formed the impression that the College was currently well served by its teaching resources. The College is encouraged to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained though effective planning and evaluation.
7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

This chapter reports on the general planning and management of student support services at the College and specifically comments on the following: career and employment services; student finances; accommodation catering and transport; medical and counselling facilities; international student services; and social and recreational services and facilities. The Panel’s findings in relation to the profile of students at the College, student behaviour as well as student satisfaction and climate are also included.

7.1 Students and Student Support Services Planning & Management

The College acknowledges the importance of Student Support Services and their role to “supplement and complement the existing learning efforts”. The College also states that these services “provide additional support to the student by focusing on the importance of cultural, social and economic factors that have a bearing on the student perceptions” (Portfolio, p.57).

Not all of the student support services available at the College (there are 9 in total) are in the remit of one department. The planning and management of most of these services is the responsibility of the Student Affairs Department while the rest are planned and delivered by the Admissions and Registration Office and other administrative departments (Portfolio, p.57). The College also reports that the Student Affairs Department is supported by the Student Council and that qualified and experienced staff are used to manage and deliver sports and recreational services and handle student grievances. There is a yearly calendar of student activities which is used to create a calendar of student events for the following year. The Panel noted in particular the contribution of the two Sports Activities Officers, one for male and one for female students. The Panel is concerned, however, about the current lack of coordination of the planning and management of the different student support services offered by different departments and units.

Recommendation 19

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement an overarching plan for its different student support services which is aligned to strategic objectives and provides for effective coordination and management of its provision of these services.

At the time of the audit visit, the HoD of Student Affairs post was being covered on an “acting” basis by the Director of Marketing and Public Relations. The Panel considers that effort should be made by the College to make a full time appointment for this post as soon as possible to ensure appropriate capacity to meet the demands of this role (also see Recommendation 3).

The College also needs to ensure that terms of reference, policies and procedures for the different departments and units providing student support services are effectively coordinated and aligned.

With respect to policies and procedures, the Panel noted that a number of those concerning student affairs had been collated in a Student Affairs Manual 2010-2011. This manual includes policies, procedures and guidelines for students and staff covering: Student Induction; the Student Council; Student Discipline; Student Complaints and Grievances; and Student Satisfaction. Both the formal status of these documents and the way in which their contents are communicated to relevant stakeholder remained unclear. In relation to different policies, the words “To be approved by the Academic Board October 2010” and “To be approved by the Steering Committee October 2010” appear; other policies, which don’t appear to have been implemented, indicate that they were approved in 2010 (see Section 7.3). The Panel considers that these documents need to be reviewed (also see Recommendation 9), and where necessary, formally approved, prior to relevant information in the manual being communicated effectively to
The Panel noted that the current manual includes procedures and guidelines for staff that would be inappropriate to include in a document for students.

7.2 Student Profile

The College describes its student profile in some detail (Portfolio, pp. 57-61). Several charts are included in the Portfolio which illustrate the growth in numbers, especially between 2004 and 2009; the distribution of enrolled students by majors; and the distribution of enrolled students by source of finance is also considered (student finance is considered in Section 7.6 below). The dramatic growth in the number of part-time students is highlighted (Portfolio, p.59). This growth in student numbers is attributed to several factors, both internal and external. The composition of the student population in terms of gender is considered as is the number of expatriate students (Portfolio, p.61). The number of majors offered by the College has increased. The Panel also noted, however, that College data indicates a significant decline in student enrolments in 2011-2012 relative to 2010-2011 (Portfolio, p.86).

The College reports that growth in student numbers has informed review of infrastructure requirements and plans (Portfolio, p.61). The Panel considers that the College would benefit from the planning and management of its student support services also being formally informed by its detailed student profile data.

7.3 Student Satisfaction and Climate

The College states its commitment to fostering a positive and congenial student climate and indicates that opportunities for students to express their opinions are provided by, for example, the Student Affairs Department as well as by academic advising meetings and staff-student meetings (Portfolio, p.61). The Panel noted that a Student Council has been established with representatives of full-time and part-time students and a student suggestion box has been reintroduced. The College also states, however, that “An area of improvement to be addressed is the regular and systematic means of conducting a comprehensive student survey to obtain a better picture of the overall institutional climate” (Portfolio, p.61). The Panel was encouraged to note that the College has developed a comprehensive Student Satisfaction Survey but, although this includes the wording “Approved by the Steering Committee October 2010”, it was evident that it has yet to be implemented.

The Panel, therefore, remained concerned that overall student satisfaction is not yet measured systematically at the College. This is required to help identify student issues and inform decision making processes. The Panel recognizes that the College’s development of a Student Satisfaction Survey Policy should facilitate implementation of an effective system.

Recommendation 20

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College implement a system to ensure that student satisfaction is monitored effectively through the collection of valid data which is used to inform planning and improvement cycles.

7.4 Student Behaviour

The College states that “The code of conduct is clearly outlined and communicated to students through the student manual” (Portfolio, p.62). The Panel did not, however, find evidence of this. The Honours Degree Quality Manual and the brochures for the SQA programs and the General Foundation Program, which are effectively student handbooks, do not contain a College code of conduct. The Student Affairs Manual contains a comprehensive Student Discipline Policy, within which there is reference to “code of conduct” but the policy gives unclear information about its status in terms of approval and the manual itself is a collection of institutional
documents and is not in an appropriate form for circulation to students. The College states that “At the overall College level, interviews with college staff indicate that the college fails to address few behavioral problems [sic] in a systematic way” (Portfolio, p.62). The Panel suggests that clear communication of relevant policies, procedures and guidelines will help to address this (see Section 7.1).

The College employs a certified counsellor who the Panel found is actively involved in different areas of College life and provides support and guidance for students when behavioural problems arise. The Panel viewed a sample of student counseling records in accordance with this.

The Panel appreciates that the College also pays particular attention to inculcating desired behaviours and values in its student community through a range of appropriately selected activities (see Commendation 3).

7.5 Career and Employment Services

The College states that it has been helping students with internships and employment for a number of years but acknowledges that this has been an outcome of the personal effort of individual staff rather than systematic planning (Portfolio, p.62, also see Section 2.7). The Panel noted that in addition to the efforts of the Training Manager to assist students with finding employment, individual academic departments have also organized career information activities.

The College recognizes the need to provide career and employment services systematically. It states that a Career and Alumni Department has been established to address this and that this department is taking an active role in providing CV and interview workshops for students (Portfolio, p.62). While it was clear that the College has engaged in activities of this nature, it was unclear whether these were actually organized by the Career and Alumni Department which the College states been established “recently” (Portfolio, p.45).

The Panel found clear intent for the College to establish this new department, and noted, for example, the terms of references for the department, the student registration process, guidelines relating to how visiting students or alumni are to be dealt with, and an “operational plan” for 2010-2011. The College did not report on achievements against the plan.

Clarity needs to be established, however, about the exact name of the department (which varies through the Portfolio and in College documents), the location of the department in the organizational structure, and staffing. Presently, “Career and Alumni” is shown as part of Student Affairs on the organizational structure (Portfolio, p.12), whereas the Panel heard that the new department will be part of Marketing and Public Relations and include the Training function which is situated in this department (see Section 2.7). Also, at the time of the audit visit, the Panel was advised that the head of the Career and Alumni Department had only just been nominated and so was not available for interview.

The Panel appreciates that, as in other areas, activities that have previously been conducted on an ad hoc basis are now in the process of becoming systematized and the Panel recognizes the steps being taken to ensure that career and employment services are provided in this manner.

Affirmation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that career and employment services need to be provided to students in a systematic manner and supports the recent creation of a specific department to undertake this role.
7.6 **Student Finances**

The Panel acknowledges the financial support which Muscat College extends to students through schemes involving deferred and flexible payment options and cash discounts. There are also a number of full and partial student scholarships which amount to 2.5-3.0% of Muscat College’s annual budget (Portfolio, p.63). The Panel found these arrangements to be much appreciated by students.

7.7 **Accommodation, Catering and Transport**

Although the College does not have any hostel accommodation for students, the Student Affairs Department provides information and help for students to secure accommodation in the private sector (Portfolio, p.64).

The College provides transport, free of charge, to and from various hostels and has a canteen which provides catering through a private contractor (Portfolio, p.64). The College also states that student feedback is sought through surveys and that action may be taken as a result. The Panel did not explore this area in any depth but also did not come across evidence of specific issues in this area. The College nevertheless states that it is “acutely aware of the need to improve its transport and catering services” and it acknowledges that a “proper feedback and communication mechanism is required” (Portfolio, p.64). The Panel therefore encourages the College to ensure that these services are evaluated effectively in order to determine what steps can be taken to improve them.

7.8 **Medical and Counselling Facilities**

There is a “health centre room” on the College campus which is open every working day from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm and is staffed by a qualified nurse (Portfolio, p.65). A qualified counselor is also available (see Section 7.4). As in other areas of student support services, the Panel encourages the College to ensure that this area is evaluated effectively.

7.9 **International Student Services**

The enrollment of international students at the College is the responsibility of the Department of Admission and Registration with support from the Human Resources and Administration Department. The College’s student profile data indicates that it has a relatively low number of international students (Portfolio, p.61) and the College reports that, currently, it does not have a strategy or formal procedures specifically for recruiting international students. The Panel appreciates the College’s acknowledgement that, if more international students are to be recruited, appropriate services will be need to be developed accordingly (Portfolio, p.65).

7.10 **Social and Recreational Services and Facilities**

The College reports that, under the supervision of Student Affairs, various social, cultural and sporting activities are offered and that yearly plans are informed by evaluation of the previous years’ achievements and failures (Portfolio, p.66). These events include regularly timetabled activities which specifically address culture and social responsibility in line with the College’s Mission, Vision and Values (Portfolio, p.9). The Panel heard that there was a specific budget for these activities, although did not confirm this.

The Panel found particular strength in this area. It examined consecutive yearly plans and confirmed that a wide range of events take place on a regular basis. The cultural activities (“Al-Barza”) often carry a message and are explicitly mapped to the values of the College and desired behaviours for students. The College also aims to foster a caring attitude among the students towards the wider community in Oman through various charitable and social activities. The Panel found that the program of activities is reviewed at the end of every month and the outcomes
of activities are recorded. The Panel heard how this informs the development of future plans. The Panel noted in particular the proactive approach of the female sports coach to involve female students in activities and the efforts of the Student Affairs Department to ensure the participation of part-time students.

The Panel found that students as well as external stakeholders hold the College’s extracurricular student activities in high regard and consider this a distinctive characteristic of the College. The College notes that the underlying message of its strategy has remained constant in including the need to prepare students for their transition to becoming contributing members of society with appreciation and respect for their culture (Portfolio, p.9). The Panel appreciates the systematic way in which this is addressed through the College’s program of social and recreational activities.

**Commendation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Muscat College for its extensive range of extracurricular activities for students which serve to fulfill the cultural aspect of its Mission and Vision and through which the College Values and desired behaviours are fostered in students.
8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

Staff and staff support services are the responsibility of the College’s Human Resources and Administration Department. The draft Strategic Plan 2011-2014 includes a SWOT analysis which identifies staff retention as a weakness and low staff morale as a threat. A strategic goal to provide services and resources to promote staff (as well as student) retention has been retained in this plan from an earlier strategic goal setting exercise in 2008.

This chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to planning and management of human resources at the College and addresses areas such as recruitment and selection; staff induction; professional development; performance management; promotions; staff organizational climate and retention; and Omanisation.

8.1 Human Resources Planning & Management

The College’s Human Resources unit consists of six staff members, including a recently appointed Director of Human Resources and Administration who reports to the Vice-Dean and has the responsibility, as defined in his job description, to “develop, implement and manage the Human Resource and Administration strategies to enable the College to achieve its current and future objectives”.

The Panel found that human resources (HR) planning and management are currently undertaken in response to specific needs and requirements for HR identified by individual department heads which are reported on an annual basis. This planning is based on expected new admissions with the intention of maintaining an academic staff to student ratio of 1:20 (Portfolio, p.67). Long term HR planning in relation to strategic objectives has yet to be addressed systematically. In addition, specific actions to promote staff retention identified in the draft Strategic Plan have yet to be implemented.

The College has recognized its current deficiencies in HR planning and management (Portfolio, p.67) and has made preliminary efforts to address these through the development of a comprehensive draft HR Manual, and the integration of HR goals and actions into the draft Strategic Plan. These actions need to be supported by the development and implementation of an effective system of operational planning for HR management, which is in alignment with the College’s strategic goals and which addresses all aspects of staffing at the College (see Recommendation 6).

The College states that the draft HR Manual has yet to be finalized and approved (Portfolio, p.69). The Panel notes that it will be important for the College to ensure that the detailed processes and requirements in any approved version of this manual align with the College’s organizational structure and other institutional systems, and that its implementation is carefully managed.

8.2 Staff Profile

The College indicates that it has 60 academic staff members and 52 administrative (non-academic) staff members (Portfolio, p.67 and p.82). The Staff List examined by the Panel showed only five academic staff members with a PhD qualification. The Panel found a significant number of academic staff members to be working towards a PhD qualification, including ten academic staff in the Department of Computing. College data shows that four academic staff members are employed on a part-time basis, while all of the administrative staff are employed on a full-time basis. Female staff members are well represented across the College, representing 55% of academic staff members and 67% of administrative staff members. Nearly
70% of the administrative staff are Omani nationals, compared to 7% of the academic staff (Portfolio, p. 82).

The College did not provide a specific evaluation of its staff profile, but indicates it makes specific effort to recruit Oman nationals and to increase the number of academic staff with PhD degrees (Portfolio, p.68). There is no indication that staff profile information is being used effectively for HR planning and development.

8.3 Recruitment and Selection

The College’s Human Resources Department is responsible for co-coordinating the recruitment process (Portfolio, p.68).

The Panel learned that positions are advertised, short-listed candidates are invited for interview by a panel and, in the case of academic staff members, candidates are required to do a teaching demonstration. The College indicates that candidates also take an English language test (Portfolio, p.69) and the Panel heard as well that academic staff CVs are sent to affiliated partners for their approval. The Panel heard that the final approval of academic appointments has, to date, rested with the Academic Council, based on a majority vote, with decisions on the administrative staff being made by relevant HoDs. The Panel was advised that when the College’s new organizational structure is fully implemented, and a standing committee for recruitment and employment takes up its role, this approvals process will change.

The College indicates that it faces difficulties with recruiting qualified and experienced academic staff members, particularly in the Department of Built Environment Engineering (Portfolio, p.68). The Panel heard that several candidates had been identified for the Dean’s position (vacant since November 2010), but the College had been unsuccessful in securing a suitable candidate. The Panel also noted that the Head of the Computing Department has been serving in an “acting” capacity for two years. Two other HoDs of academic departments are also in acting roles as well at the HoD Student Affairs (also see Section 1.3).

Whilst the College has recruitment and selection processes in place, the Panel did not find these to be formally documented in detail or to have been subject to formal evaluation. These aspects need to be addressed to support overarching HR strategy in ensuring that these processes contribute effectively to vacant positions being filled with appropriate candidates. The Panel noted that the College’s organizational structure is still being established (see Recommendation 1) and that its existing recruitment and selection procedures will need undergo change in accordance with this.

**Recommendation 21**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure that its staff recruitment and selection processes are clearly documented and subject to regular evaluation to ensure they are effective in supporting strategic staffing needs of the College being met.

8.4 Induction

The College states that it has a comprehensive induction process (over 3-4 weeks) which involves the Human Resources Department and the staff member’s department (Portfolio, p.69). The Staff Induction Policy was examined by the Panel, along with a sample, completed, corresponding Staff Induction Checklist. Whilst the policy clearly addresses the specific context of Muscat College, it contains reference to an unrelated institution; action is required to address this.
During interviews, the Panel confirmed that new staff members are introduced via e-mail and given a tour of the College by the Human Resources Department, as described by the College (Portfolio, p.69). Academic staff members are then allocated a mentor who is responsible for training the new staff member in College procedures. New administrative staff members receive a briefing from their supervisor about the operational aspects in the department. The Panel was pleased to hear from recently recruited academic and administrative staff members that they were generally satisfied with their induction and that a collegial atmosphere existed within departments. The Panel notes, however, that no formal evaluation of the induction process has been conducted and encourages this to be addressed.

8.5 Professional Development

The College states that it “is in the process of framing a draft policy” for the professional development of staff (Portfolio, p.69). This was due to be implemented during 2010-2011, but has not been realized to date. The draft HR Manual, which has also not yet been approved and implemented, contains a section on “Training and Development”. According to the HR Manual, line managers would review and plan staff members’ training needs during their annual appraisal interview. The Panel noted that the draft Strategic Plan identifies “Staff development” as an objective and this is also listed as a specific action “to fill a gap”.

The College concedes that professional development is undertaken in an “opportunistic manner” by staff members “via their own means and resources” and that there is a need to “establish a formal [Professional Development] program” which “may help improve retention levels” (Portfolio, p.70). Furthermore, the College indicates that staff development workshops (for example workshops to train Internal Verifiers in quality assurance procedures) are “practiced but not documented” (Portfolio, p.70). A 2009-2010 UoS report indicated that the University offers a fee concession for two College staff members per annum who wish to pursue a PhD at the University. To date, one staff member has taken up this offer. The Panel also viewed evidence of staff development in the form of ad hoc training workshops attended by individual staff members and conducted by affiliated and external partners, such as WebCT workshops conducted by UoS.

It was nevertheless confirmed during interviews with staff members that there is no formal staff development plan in place, and no specific budget is allocated towards staff development (which is itemized under the Staff Welfare budget). Furthermore, this area was highlighted as a problem in a 2009-2010 staff satisfaction survey, which indicates a lack of review of staff development needs and low satisfaction with learning and development opportunities. The College recognizes the need to address staff professional development systematically (Portfolio, p.70). The Panel agrees with this and urges action to be taken.

Recommendation 22

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a staff development policy and plan, which is reviewed on a regular basis, to promote the professional development of staff and support the College's strategic goal of increasing staff retention and maintaining quality.

8.6 Performance Planning and Review

The College states that the performance of academic staff is reviewed through teaching observations and Unit and Assessor Evaluation forms (Portfolio, p. 70). The Panel confirmed that these processes take place, although there is inconsistency in the implementation of the teaching observation system (also see Section 2.5). The Panel noted, however, that these systems are the only mechanisms used to evaluate academic staff members, and, moreover, there appear to be no formal systems in place for the evaluation of non-academic staff.
The Panel noted that the College’s draft Strategic Plan identifies “revitalizing the staff appraisal system” as a specific action plan. In addition, the draft HR Manual includes a section on performance management which provides for annual performance reviews using performance appraisal forms, although the manual is still in draft form and the forms have not been developed. According to the draft HR Manual, the performance evaluation also forms the basis for allocating performance-based rewards. These documents highlight the College’s awareness of the need for action to the taken in this area, although this is not identified in the Portfolio, and more work is required.

The Panel considers that there is a strong need for systematic performance planning and management at the College, which is linked to its strategic and operational goals and staff profile, and used to improve staff performance.

**Recommendation 23**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a formal staff performance management system, which is reviewed on a regular basis and linked to the College’s strategic goals and operational plans.

8.7  

**Promotion and Other Incentives**

The College states that it has “limited promotion guidelines in the form of Salary Scale [sic] for the Academic Staff” (Portfolio, p.71) but no guidelines for promotion criteria for administrative staff members. The Panel viewed evidence of both academic and non-academic staff receiving bonus payments for good performance, but these are awarded on an *ad hoc* basis.

In recognition of the need for appropriate processes to be developed in this area, the College reports that it has engaged a consultant to develop documents related to promotions and incentives at the College and that draft documentation has been developed (Portfolio, p.71). The Panel viewed the draft HR Manual resulting from this project and noted that it includes a section on promotions, which contains references to defined academic ranks, as well as a section on salary structure which specifies allowances. The draft HR Manual has not yet been formally adopted at the College.

Since attracting and retaining staff is an important issue for the College, the Panel considers that clear policies and guidelines for promotions and other incentives need to be implemented in support of the College’s efforts to attract and retain the staff it requires to fulfill its strategic aims and supports the work being undertaken to achieve this.

**Affirmation 6**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Muscat College that promotion and other incentives need to be dealt with clearly and systematically and supports the College’s development of a detailed draft approach to address this.

8.8  

**Severance**

Severance procedures at the College are governed by the Omani Labor Law. The College documents the process for dismissing staff members which includes an initial verbal warning. This is followed by opportunities for improvement and finally dismissal, if required. The employee can appeal the decision and the final decision for dismissal rests with the Chairman. Exit interviews are conducted (Portfolio, pp. 70-71).
The Panel noted that the draft HR Manual describes this process in its section on the termination of employment.

8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

The College acknowledges that it does not conduct regular surveys to gauge staff satisfaction, but that “random surveys” have been conducted (Portfolio, p.72). The Panel was provided with evidence of a comprehensive staff satisfaction survey carried out in 2009/2010. It appeared to the Panel that this survey was generated by an independent survey group from the UK working in association with UoS. A General Support Services survey, clearly generated by the College but undated, was also conducted. The College makes no comment on data generated from these surveys but acknowledges that they “were not focused towards improving the staff organizational climate or retention” (Portfolio, p.72). The Panel found that no other staff satisfaction surveys have been conducted at the College.

Regular staff surveys, appropriately designed and administered, have the potential to provide the College with data that systematically informs management decision making and brings about changes to improve organizational climate and retention. The College needs to implement a system that can achieve this. The Panel notes that an important element of such a system is to ensure that survey participants are kept informed of survey results and any actions taken in response to these.

Recommendation 24

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop and implement a system which ensures that staff satisfaction is monitored effectively and opportunities for improvement are identified and addressed.

Whilst the College did not formally identify staff retention as a challenge in its self-study, it is identified in the draft Strategic Plan and was acknowledged by the College during the audit visit. Retention of staff is an important factor in ensuring quality and continuity of teaching and services, and the Panel considers it important for the College to conduct a thorough investigation into the reasons for the high staff attrition rate, and deploy strategies to alleviate this problem.

Recommendation 25

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College formally investigate factors contributing to low staff retention and implement strategies to alleviate this.

8.10 Omanisation

The College follows the Ministry of Labour regulations in relation to Omanisation and has a draft Omanisation policy which aims to “attract, develop and retain local talent” (Portfolio, p.72). The Panel viewed the policy and encourages the College to work towards formal approval of this.

The College has been successful in achieving Omanisation targets in its administrative departments and reports receiving “favourable reports from the Ministry with respect to Omanisation” (Portfolio, p.73). The College reports that the number of Omani academic staff members remains relatively low due to difficulties recruiting local talent (Portfolio p.72).

The Panel appreciates the College’s stated commitment to Omanisation but encourages enhanced effort to be made to recruit Omani academic staff in particular.
9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

This chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to general support services and facilities and their management at the College. Public relations and marketing as well as communication services are also considered.

9.1 General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management

In this section of the Portfolio the College lists the wide range of general support services it provides, but does not address the planning and management of either these or College facilities (Portfolio, p.74). There appears to be no coordination of the general support services provided within the context of the strategic directions of the College and the Panel considers that this is required to ensure ongoing, effective provision.

Recommendation 26

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College develop a comprehensive plan for the provision of its general support services which is aligned with strategic objectives and supported by mechanisms for regular and effective evaluation of the various services provided.

The College reports staff satisfaction with these services as indicated by the results of a survey conducted to evaluate them (Portfolio page 74). The Panel appreciates this evaluation, but found no mention of feedback from the survey being reviewed and acted upon. The Panel encourages the College to make use of the information gleaned from such surveys to continuously improve its services. The Panel also noted that the survey was undated.

Although the College did not report on facilities planning and management, the Panel viewed the new Facilities Manual. This is discussed further below (see Section 9.4). The Panel recognizes that implementation of the requirements of the manual will support planning and management of the College’s general support services and facilities.

9.2 Public Relations and Marketing

The College states that the Department of Marketing and Public Relations was established in 2006. The College is promoted in the local media through articles on student gatherings and College events (Portfolio, p. 74). The Panel heard that College promotional literature and marketing aims to be informative rather than overselling the College through the use of commercial advertising.

The Panel was informed that the College was in the process of removing the term “University College” from all its promotional and other materials in line with a recent directive from the Ministry of Higher Education regarding the College’s unauthorized use of this title. The Panel was informed that this was likely to be fully achieved within a year. The College is urged to complete this task as soon as possible in order to ensure that students and other stakeholders are not misled about the status of the College and its activities (see Affirmation 1).

The Panel was also concerned about the accuracy of both language and information in College documents, including the Portfolio, and also on the College website. In addition to frequent English language errors, the Panel noted, for example, inaccuracies in program titles as well as objectives given on the website that appear to have no formal status in the College. The Panel considers that these errors reflect negatively on the College and that a system is required to
ensure that information put into the public domain, whether in electronic form or paper based, is accurate, appropriate and free of linguistic errors.

**Recommendation 27**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Muscat College ensure that all formal documents in the public domain contain precise and accurate information and are free from language errors.

### 9.3 Communication Services

The College states that it “uses different types of good communication system (methods) between its internal communities (staff and students)” (Portfolio, p.75). The Panel confirmed that the College has a wide variety of communication channels, both electronic and paper based. The relative effectiveness of these channels, however, remains to be determined and the Panel did note some apparent lapses in effective communication. For example, the College SQA Brochure provides details of the SQA framework concerning academic integrity, yet the College asserts that “There are no clear policies and procedures defined by the SQA for the HNC/HND Programs” (Portfolio, p.28). This view was also provided to the Panel during its on site interviews.

### 9.4 Facilities Management

The College states that it “does not have policy [sic] for general facilities planning and management. All the infrastructural development and facility management are provided on an ad hoc basis” (Portfolio, p.76). It also states, however, that it has a master plan for campus development. The Panel viewed the master plan and noted architectural plans for a new library / multipurpose hall. This aligns with infrastructure improvements identified in the draft Strategic Plan. The Panel did not investigate the status of these plans.

The Panel also noted the College’s newly developed Facilities Manual. This comprehensive document describes both the day-to-day management of the various College facilities as well as strategic asset management. It appeared, however, that this manual has yet to be communicated to relevant staff and implemented.

The College relocated into its current, purpose built campus in 2004 (Portfolio, p.3) and the Panel found evidence of considerable effort being made by the College to ensure that this campus provides a clean and well-maintained environment for its students and staff. The day-to-day management of many of the facilities, such as campus security; office equipment, furniture and fixtures; the supervision of many of the services; and cleaning and maintenance is the responsibility of the Services and Follow-Up Department. The College states that it gives priority to cleanliness (Portfolio, p.77) and the Panel viewed a comprehensive policy addressing this. A staff survey of general support services viewed by the Panel showed many aspects of the College environment to be considered positive. The College is encouraged to ensure that regular feedback from students as well as staff is used to inform action in support of its efforts in this area.
APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

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APPENDIX B. ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

The following abbreviations, acronyms and terms are used in this Report. As necessary, they are explained in context. In some cases, URLs are provided to facilitate further enquiries about these acronyms and terms.

ACCA ............................................ Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ADRI ............................................ A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising:
                                         Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.
Approach ..................................... The first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating
                                         what a HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to
                                         achieve it.
CQC ............................................. Central Quality Committee
Deployment .................................. The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a
                                         HEI’s plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not,
                                         why not.
ELC ............................................. English Language Centre
Executive Officer .......................... An OAAA staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide
                                         professional guidance and support.
External Reviewer .......................... A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person
                                         approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the
                                         OAAA’s various external review Panels.
GFP ............................................. General Foundation Program
GPA ............................................. Grade Point Average
HEI ............................................. Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education
                                         Provider)
Hons ........................................... Honours
HNC ............................................ Higher National Certificate
HND ............................................ Higher National Diploma
HoD ............................................. Head of Department
HR ............................................. Human Resources
HSE ............................................. Health, Safety and Environment
ICAEW ....................................... Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
ICAI ............................................ Institute of Chartered Accountants of in Ireland
Improvement ................................. The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how
                                         effectively an organisation is improving its approach and deployment
                                         for any given topic in order to achieve better results.
IT ................................................ Information Technology
MoHE .......................................... Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
OAAA ......................................... Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oaaa.gov.om)
OAAA Board ................................. The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OFI ............................................. Opportunity for improvement.
OQF ............................................. Oman Qualifications Framework.
Panel Chairperson .......................... The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member ................................. An OAC External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
Portfolio ......................................... see Quality Audit Portfolio.

Quality Assurance ....................... The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.

Quality Audit ............................. An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision.

Quality Audit Portfolio ............... The report produced as the result of a self study. Also forms the main submission made to the OAC by the HEI being audited.

Quality Audit Report ................. A public report published by the OAC which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel’s External Review of a HEI.

QAU ........................................ Quality Assurance Unit

Quality Enhancement .................. The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing approach, deployment and results.

Results .................................... The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic’s approach and deployment.

ROSQA .................................. Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Sic ........................................ Indicates that the preceding segment of the quote was copied faithfully, in spite of a mistake

SQA ........................................ Scottish Qualifications Authority

SWOT ...................................... strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

System ..................................... In this Report, system refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.

TOEFL ..................................... Test of English as a Foreign Language

UoS ......................................... University of Stirling, Scotland, UK