

# OQNHE

## Message from the Editorial Team

The Oman Quality Network in Higher Education is pleased to launch Issue 3 of its E-Newsletter in line with its mission to enhance the quality of higher education through sharing of ideas.

Establishing internal quality assurance systems in Higher Education Institutions that have developed earlier has been a challenge and with the help of the clear guidelines and trainings given by the OAAA, most HEI's are now gearing themselves for the Stage 2 Audit of OAAA's Institutional and Program Standards. We hope that this newsletter will serve as a platform to share our good practices and also learn from the good practices of other HEI's in Oman. We are also proud to announce our new website [www.oqnhe.om](http://www.oqnhe.om) which is now live . We thank HEI's for their contribution to this newsletter and encourage more participation from all HEI's.



**Hannah Manogaran**  
OQNHE Executive  
Member and Quality  
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Waljat College of Applied  
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## Impact of International Standards on Accreditation of Oman's Higher Education Institutions

Accreditation of a Higher Education Institution (HEI) adjudges the institution's operations against defined standards. This raises the question of "whose standards". There are numerous accrediting bodies worldwide, both government and non-government organizations. However, there is no single authority that accredits the other accrediting bodies. As a result, while many accrediting organizations can be praised for their rigorous standards, others can be criticized for their lax standards. For example, a list of unrecognized accrediting bodies and suspected "accreditation mills" can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_unrecognized\\_higher\\_education\\_accreditation\\_organizations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_unrecognized_higher_education_accreditation_organizations). Ultimately, the inherent value of any accreditation certificate depends on the specific standards and rigorous procedures used in the accreditation process.

There is a growing tendency in the international community to consider the specific standards involved in a

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HEI's accreditation, as opposed to simply considering whether the HEI possesses an accreditation certificate. This is particularly evident in medical education. For some time, the General Medicine Council (UK) has ranked foreign medical schools based on internationally-recognized standards for medical education. Graduates of the lowest-ranked medical schools are ineligible to write the professional examination required for postgraduate training or medical practice in the UK. Medical education in the USA and Canada is overseen by the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME). The LCME has recently ruled that, beginning in 2023, it will only recognize the foreign medical degrees of students who graduate from HEI's that meet accreditation standards comparable to those of the LCME. Graduates of medical schools that lack LCME-comparable accreditation standards will be ineligible for post-

graduate training in USA. It is reasonable to assume that similar restrictions will apply in Canada, although the Medical Council of Canada has not yet announced its decision. The Medical Council of India has taken a different approach and now requires foreign medical schools to provide evidence that their educational programs are recognized and approved by the local Ministry of Health (in addition to approval/accreditation by the local Ministry of Higher Education) before it permits the graduates for postgraduate training or medical practice in India.

The responsibility for accreditation of Omani HEI's falls on the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority which draws heavily upon internationally-recognized standards. Such standards provide strong benchmarks for Omani institutions in their efforts to achieve academic

excellence and international acceptance. Given the increasing globalization of higher education, it is likely that emphasis on internationally-recognized standards will spread to other countries, and to other professions and career paths. In effect, all higher education graduates are competing in the same global contest, and their qualifications and performance are being judged using the same criteria. Adopting best-practice methods and meeting internationally-recognized standards will ensure that the graduates of Omani HEI's are part of the global winner's circle.



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### Professional Development Program in Oman College of Management and Technology (OCMT)

Professional Development Program for every Omani institution and university varies differently when it comes to its meaning and activities. In OCMT, it's a regular practice to all staff, academic and non-academic to attend internal seminar and workshop organized by the QA Department. It started about 3 years ago and has been in practice ever since. The impact of learning after attending the seminar or workshop makes a difference from their old views on academic, personal and sometimes even social attitudes. Issues related from administrative to academic were also tackled and discussed to close the gap of which

traditional management has between the management and its staff. The OCMT Community strengthens its bond and socialization among each other after sometime of sharing their views, ideas, opinions and experiences from different topics. What is good in this practice is that by sharing each other's experiences, many have enhanced the benefits of learning. Though everyone has his own characteristics and personality, coming from different cultures, but in the seminar or workshop, everyone feels the camaraderie and harmony, no pressure to ask or to answer questions, and is free to express his/her own ideas and opinions. Topic varies from classroom management, re-

search, quality assurance, college policies and others which gives more information and applies to the real situation inside the college. To conclude on this, just like the saying goes "Quality begins on the inside... then works its way out" by Bob Moawad. The OCMT Community would like to extend this good practice to its external community and HEIs who are also having the same related activity. By this way, academic professional relationship with quality will be established among HEIs throughout the network in the Sultanate.



**Dr. Adalia Martin,**  
*Head of Quality Assurance,  
Oman College of Management  
and Technology*

## Good practice at Majan College

Majan College (University College), the pioneer private higher education institution in the Sultanate, and reputed for its strength and innovation in learning and teaching prides itself with good practice across the spectrum of academia. A few worthy of note are as follows:

**Assessment:** "Turnitin" in use by students for over six years involves submitting assignments online and availing of valuable lecturer feedback through Majan's Online Virtual Environment (MOVE).

**Atrium:** An intranet site designed to allow staff to share ideas, initiatives, learning and teaching experiences as well as a platform for sharing minutes of meetings.

**External Examiners:** Always from UK Universities review assessments, moderate marking, monitor all components of the curriculum

on the programmes offered and attend examination boards.

**Integrated Campus Management System (ICMS):** ICMS, in use for the past three years is continuously updated. It provides sponsors with access to attendance records, academic performance of their students and is presently automated to warn students of low attendance via e-mail. In addition, registration statistics, student academic transcripts, student and lecturer timetables, and all necessary reports are generated from it.

**Mobile Learning:** Doceri, an interactive ipad application allows lecturers to interact with PowerPoint presentations from the classroom PC, whilst enabling the lecturer to annotate on to presentation slides for emphasis. Students also use the ipad to respond to questions. The use of this innovative technology adds a new dimension to interactive learning.

**Peer Review of Teaching and Assessments:** A procedure that entails the

review of teaching and assessments by peers, including materials posted on MOVE, has been in existence for many years.

**Online Learning Resources:** The following online resources have been in use and available to students and staff.

**Proquest -** A multidisciplinary full text database of online journals, provides students with access to 27 most highly used databases.

**Ebrary -** Online database of ebooks in most subject areas.

**Online 'New staff' Induction:** New staff members work through an online induction programme in order to familiarize themselves with the procedures and policies at their own pace.



**Philip Barber**  
Head of Quality Enhancement  
Majan College

## OQNHE conducts workshop on 'Progressive Pedagogy'



OQNHE organized a workshop titled 'Progressive Pedagogy' on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2013 at Mazoon College. The workshop was attended by representatives from all Higher Education Institutions in the Sultanate. The workshop was con-

ducted by Dr Kakul Agha, Head of Postgraduate Studies at Middle East College. This workshop targeted the teaching and learning approaches used in higher education institutions. It dealt with ways of engaging learners in a class room and to update on more techniques of progressive pedagogy.

The delivery involved a mix of developing conceptual clarity on new ideas of progressive pedagogy, experiential learning, and self-reflection as well group and individual work. The participants were fully engaged into developing their skills and doing a self-

reflection on the approaches being used by them in the classroom during teaching as well as outside classroom learning of the students. Insights were provided on engaging students with new approaches.

The participants showed a positive interest in all the well designed activities that were used within the session. Dr Kakul Agha was able to successfully engage all the participants with activities and exercises in the six-hour workshop. A certificate of appreciation was presented to Dr Kakul Agha.

## Improving the quality of teaching by sharing the good practices with peers

Sharing one's experience and good practices in teaching with peers is one of the effective methods of improving the quality of teaching. This helps in identifying areas of strength and address areas requiring improvement. When this is done with a person from a similar field of specialisation, both could benefit from this sharing of experience. Academic Staff members of Muscat College have greatly benefited from this practice.

To facilitate this process, an observation of the delivery lecture should be arranged with the respective peer. A constructive discussion with the peer before the observation is highly recommended. This pre-observation discussion serves to discuss mat-

ters relating to the topic of the lecture and suitable methods of delivery.

An observation form is required to record the good practices of teaching and to note remarks during the delivery of the lecture. The good practices which could be included are the organisation of the class, topics reviewed, that are applicable to the present lecture, the presentation of content, method of delivery, classroom management and the rapport the lecture has with the students. Additional space in the observation form is also required for the observer to write points and feedback related to the lecture.

A post observation discussion needs to be arranged to reiterate the good practices and to address areas requiring improvement. All peer-review exercises are to be carried out in a thor-

oughly positive and professional atmosphere so that it benefits both parties.

The teaching observation process gives an opportunity to evaluate a lecture from another person's perspective and can improve the quality of teaching by adopting the recommended good practices.

Muscat College has been practicing teaching observation exercises successfully since the beginning of the academic year 2003-04. Lecturers have benefitted from sharing each other's experiences and knowledge, which in turn has promoted professional development and growth.

- *Quality Assurance Department,  
Muscat College*

## Towards More Quality In Higher Education Through Optimal Evaluation of Teacher performance

In order to reach higher quality levels in the teaching process, Ibri College of Applied Sciences has developed and implemented a comprehensive teacher evaluation policy based on the principle that the education process is based on three pillars: the teacher, the student, the curriculum. As a matter of fact, if teachers are helped to reach their fullest potential, the whole education process is improved.

This policy has been carried out by the College for the last three years. It consists in having the faculty member's performance evaluated

by different assessors, namely: the head of department, the college dean-ship, a colleague, students, and the teacher's own portfolio. Assessors have been allocated different relative

**"Quality is an asset—not a cost or afterthought; it is insurance that the product will meet the customer's true needs with uninterrupted delivery and ample performance."**

**- Bill Minckler**

weights commensurate with their propinquity to the faculty member, on the one hand, and each assessor's ability to evaluate in a fair, objective and balanced manner, on the other hand.

Teachers are evaluated in a number of areas, including: teaching, research, community service, academic advising, administrative work and extracurricular effort. Forms consisting of 10 to 20 evaluation items are filled out. Evalua-

tion items can added, amended or even removed, which makes this policy more dynamic, open to improvement, and constantly in line with new developments that occur in the academic and education fields.

The teacher evaluation policy has the following characteristics:

- **Comprehensiveness:** it touches almost all aspects of the teacher's work.
- **Fairness:** since the evaluation is done by different assessors from different departments and ranks, personal considerations and the risk of abuse of authority are discarded.
- **Balance:** different weights have

been allotted to different assessors according to each assessor's position and rank.

- Stability and flexibility at the same time: while both the assessors and the evaluation criteria are constant, the items on the appraisal forms themselves can be modified and thus allow for a high degree of flexibility in coping with changes.
- Ease of implementation: it only requires the filling out of ready-to-use forms.
- Ease of analysis.
- Ease of drawing conclusions and making recommendations.
- Time and economic feasibility: it demands neither excessive time, nor a special budget, nor any supplementary personnel.
- Objectivity and credibility: the appraisals are scrutinized so that they are as close to reality as possible.

Indicators have shown that the policy has had a positive impact on the teachers' overall performance as well as their satisfaction level. It has also boosted their commitment to raise their professional levels and work within a team. This has impacted positively on the teaching process in the college as a whole.



**Dr. Jihad Al Khalaf Bani-Younis,**  
Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Research,  
Ibri College for Applied Sciences.

**OQNHE Update:** The OQNHE Executive Committee extends its heartfelt thanks to our outgoing Ex Officio member Dr. Tess Goodliffe for all her support in the activities of the OQNHE. Though we will miss Dr. Tess, we are grateful to her for motivating and inspiring all of us at OQNHE. We also congratulate her in her new role as Deputy CEO for Technical Affairs in OAAA.

We welcome Ms Alya Al Rawahi our new Ex Officio member on the OQNHE Executive Committee in her capacity as Deputy CEO for Planning and Development. Ms. Alya has served on the Executive Committee in the past and we are sure she will bring valuable experience and insight to the OQNHE.

### What has worked for us? (Staff embracing QA)

Quality Assurance in higher education might be perceived as vague, time-consuming, and pointless by educators and administrators alike in higher educational institutions. This is one challenge we have come in contact with at Al Musanna College of Technology (ACT). We tackle this challenge through effective communication, and staff involvement.

To eliminate misconceptions about quality assurance and to ensure awareness, we made a concerted effort to reach out to every member of the college community utilizing different available communication channels such as email, college website, screen boards, mobile applications, posters, circulars, memos, as well as word of mouth. This has enabled us to get our QA message to as many of our stakeholders as possible.

Now being informed and aware is a great thing, but for quality assurance to happen involvement, participation, and contribution of all stakeholders is a must. This is easier said than done. At ACT we make sure quality assurance processes are implemented collectively and in collaboration with as many members of our community as possible.

For example, when developing our strategic plan for the next five years (2013-2018) a series of discussions took place during numerous sessions and meeting leading up to the National workshop held for developing the strategic plans for all colleges of technology. Many members of our community were involved in this process and their insights and ideas made a valuable contribution in the workshop and were included in the strategic plans. After the workshop another series of discussions took place to finalize and elaborate on the items included in the strategic plan. A similar process takes place when developing operational plans, and when handling quality assurance matters. When our stakeholders understand the process of quality assurance and realize its benefits and when they are encouraged to be part of this process instead of bystanders or mere executors of it, quality assurance works and it adds value to what we do.



**Dr. Said Masoud Ali Kashoob,**  
Act, Asst. Dean of Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance Chairman,  
Al Musanna College of Technology.

"If you don't have time to do it right you must have time to do it over."

– Unknown

## Integration and developing a culture of quality

Higher Education in Oman is witnessing a great change and growing at a steady pace, especially in the last four to five years. Not only is there an increase in both the number of institutions and people engaged in educating young Omanis, but there is also a consistent effort in putting much needed emphasis on the quality of education imparted. Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have greatly been benefitted from the Quality Audit as part of Accreditation Process (Stage-1: Self Study) initiated by the Ministry of Higher Education through its creation of Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). The various preparatory symposia, workshops and training programmes conducted by OAAA since 2008, have had positive impact on HEIs in taking up Self Study process rigorously and helped them become more quality conscious in their day to day activities.

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to take part in these processes in the last four years and

my experience is that, when an institution takes up "quality" as the most important aspect and motivates its entire staff to develop an "I CAN HELP" attitude, there is no way it can fail in accomplishing its Vision and Mission. True, at the beginning, the institution faces several difficulties and challenges as the people involved in these

processes find it over loaded and sometime even frustrated. But when they realize the importance of their role and how it supports their own functions and activities, nothing will stop them from pursuing and strengthening a "Culture of Quality". To support this, developing a working Quality Management System with clear policies and procedures by each HEI is crucial and all its stakeholders need to be totally aware of these processes for discharging their roles and responsibilities accordingly. This kind of inclusiveness and integration of ideas and experiences are pivotal to assurance of quality. I am happy to say that OAAA has successfully employed this integration process of sharing and providing opportunity to all HEIs in the recent National Sym-

posium on Institutional and Program Standards (even in earlier events as well!).

Back at IMCO, we are not only taking up seriously the OAAA guidelines and processes for the Accreditation requirements, but also in strengthening our Quality Management System, which is being implemented for ISO 9001:2008 Certification. All this is being done to create an atmosphere of integration in the institution where all will have a say and share their view points and then come to an understanding and agreement to apply what is best suited for developing a Culture of Quality. We are proud to say that we enjoy this great atmosphere at IMCO and are ready to take forward quality assurance and enhancement processes in the coming days. We expect even OQNHE to provide more opportunities regularly for HEIs to participate and contribute in future.



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## Role of Quality Assurance Units in Promoting Compliance

There is a widespread consensus on the need for an internal Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) in a Higher Education Institute (HEI), which has also been underscored by several international quality assurance agencies. Notwithstanding the view that departments themselves should be re-

**"Bad quality acts like a boomerang. It will eventually come back and hit you."  
- Paul Tang**

sponsible for policy making and enforcement, QAU serves as a promoter and collaborator of established regulatory requirements to ensure actions comport with policies – this is particularly significant in developing countries like Oman. There are, however, several factors that determine the efficiency in such an arrangement of process monitoring and streamlining in

HEIs. According to studies, in many regions worldwide where quality assurance is an emerging phenomenon, compliance with quality assurance norms has invariably been a major challenge. One must accept that the underpinning factor for this challenge is attributed to the late arrival of quality assurance and enhancement systems, leading to anathema to change. But then, as quality assurance proc-

esses address overall welfare and safety, individual discomfort could be akin to the uneasiness in fastening seatbelts, which should be disregarded.

While QAUs coordinate with departments on a wide range of activities including self-regulation of HEIs' systems and processes, the success of arrangements depends on concerted efforts of all parties involved. For instance, documentation of academic advising is an inevitable evidence of compliance in any quality assurance system, yet effectiveness of this system can be ascertained only when students or stakeholders concerned can vouchsafe its efficacy. Perhaps, a natural way of compliance is integrating requirements as part of a routine activity, just as right ingredients are added to a dish. In this way, quality requisites do not remain as stand-alone entities, but integral parts in a progression paradigm.

As quality is for everybody's well-being, a seminal role of QAU is to create this awareness that ownership of institutional quality is a shared responsibility. This can be achieved by following systematic but careful perseverance, leading to successful results, slowly but surely.



**Deputy Head – Academics**  
*Quality Assurance Unit  
College of Banking and  
Financial Studies*

## Quality and Teamwork, Two Sides of the Same Coin

Joining hands with a motto to achieve excellence forms the backbone of Quality. Quality brings in a metamorphosis only if all the concerned stakeholders come together in unison to share the same objectives in order to achieve the common goal of EXCELLENCE. Ibra College of Technology (ICT) has been able to achieve the periodical milestones pertaining to quality enhancement primarily due to the ingrained and embedded culture of teamwork. The experience gathered by yours truly while being a part of Group 8, i.e. Staff and Staff Support Services Group are pointers to the fact that it's the spirit of team work that not only binds the organization together, but also enables cross fertilization of ideas, perspectives and opinions amongst the members, thus sowing the seeds for the future. The insights brought to the table during periodical discussions are deliberated by people holding diverse background, experience, job profile, hierarchy, and past exposure resulting in the alignment of the individual department centric best practices with that of the overall organization, in the larger interest of the institution concerned. The ability to develop a culture of team work stems from the fact that walking the same path and singing the same tunes holds the key, opines, Dr. Azzah Al Maskari, Acting College Dean of ICT, "Quality is a journey, not a destination. It can only be traversed successfully if everyone joins hands to walk in the same road,

and administration staff members), culminating in the formation of a quality circle, which starts to evolve over a period of time. The regular review of plans being implemented by the college administration in consonance with the department makes it a 360 degree set-up of events, targeting all the possible stakeholders like students, teaching staff members, administrative staff members, employers, society etc. The importance of team work in facilitating practicing quality management standards in a Higher Educational Institute (HEI) is attributed towards the integrated approach followed by such institutions. The professionals of tomorrow being groomed within the four walls ought to understand the importance of collaboration, team work as that in turn forms the bedrock of their corporate or industry life once they graduate from their alma mater. Therefore, in true earnest, charity in the form of teamwork begins at home, i.e. Quality Management Practices at Ibra College of Technology. Mr. Salim Al Rashdi, Head of Business Studies Department, sums it up saying, "Teamwork forms the fulcrum of all quality initiative especially in a higher educational set up primarily because of the cause-effect relationship existing within impacts one and all, finally affecting the organization at large".



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at the same time". The blending of the quality related objectives with different activities like teaching and learning or hard core functional areas like the Human Resources are subtly done often with active inputs being taken from theorists and practitioners (read teaching staff members, technical support professionals

## OQNHE Upcoming Events

- The AGM of the Oman Quality Network in Higher Education will be held on 25th March 2013
- OQNHE will be organizing a seminar on 'Life post Audit' on 25th March 2013
- OQNHE will be organizing a conference in the month of November 2014

More news on the above will be updated on our website

We're on the web

[www.oqnhe.om](http://www.oqnhe.om)

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## Gulf College Juxtaposes Staffordshire University Foundation Programme, Pearson Test of English (PTE) and First Certificate Exam (FCE) in its Faculty of Foundation Studies

Gulf College started its Foundation Programme affiliated with Staffordshire University UK in 2004. Since then the College has been involved in an unwavering and tireless initiatives towards student development regaled through various programme streams aimed at uplifting and harnessing the English Language proficiency.

In 2011, the College conceived an idea to provide flexibility to the students to attain the requisite standard of English through an International testing facility at par with IELTS known as Pearson Test of English (PTE) and First Certificate Examination (FCE). GC took an enormous leadership of opening the first Pearson Test Examination (PTE) Centre in April 2012 and the Cambridge Exam Centre (FCE) in the Sultanate of Oman in 2013.

The PTE Academic is a stream that trains the students in different Bands classification (Bands 1-4), to achieve the desired English proficiency level before they commence their field of specialization. It likewise offers a test to students who need to prove their level of academic English when applying to study at institutions abroad or to affiliated programs in Oman. The second stream is the Cambridge

English or the so-called FCE which is one of the recent qualifications approved officially by the Cambridge University in the United Kingdom to Gulf College. The GC students need to prove that they can use written and spoken English at an upper-intermediate level for work or study purposes.

Lastly, the SU stream categorizes students into three classifications: Pre-IFP, Semester 1 and Semester 2, wherein each classification has a well-developed curriculum to equip the students with communication and academic skills that match the national and global standards.

With the three main streams in the Faculty of Foundation Studies, Gulf College regularly holds workshops and conferences with Pearson, Cambridge University and Staffordshire University to update prudently the curricular offerings and to ensure quality of instruction.



**Mr Masood Khan**  
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The articles written in this newsletter do not represent the views of the OQNHE Executive Committee