



# OQNHE



## IN FOCUS

### OQNHE 3<sup>rd</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

# Hello friends...

Oman Quality Network in Higher Education is proud to announce the publication of the fifth issue of its e-newsletter. This issue provides a glimpse into the activities conducted by the Network through some articles related to the higher education sector in Oman.

The Network organized its third international conference on Quality Management and Quality Enhancement on 24-25 February, 2015 at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Muscat. The Conference attracted many participants and attendees from the field of higher education from Oman and abroad.

In line with OQNHE's objective of enhancing the awareness of quality culture and accreditation in the HEIs in Oman, a workshop about benchmarking was organized in November 2015 at College of Banking and Financial Studies. The workshop was conducted by Dr. Lee Sutherland, an expert in management and implementation of education and training projects.

This issue contains articles focusing on building and monitoring quality systems and practices from different higher education institutions in Oman.

For more information about the network and its events, please visit our website [www.oqnhe.om](http://www.oqnhe.om).

Amal Al Aamri

OQNHE Executive Committee Member





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# **MESSAGE FROM CHAIRPERSON**

## **Dear Colleagues,**

On behalf of the OQNHE executive committee,

I have the honor to introduce to you the fifth issue of the OQNHE E-Newsletter. The E-Newsletter is a medium that contributes to our mission of sharing ideas and practices that enhance the quality of higher education institutions. It encourages collaborative initiatives and exchange of information on issues that our member institutions have faced and struggled with. The success of this and future issues relies on the support extended by your institutions. I encourage all of you to share your experiences and thoughts by sending articles to be included in the E-Newsletter whenever possible.

In the past academic year, we held a very successful conference, the third OQNHE Conference on Quality Management and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education on 24 and 25, February 2015. I had the opportunity to meet many of you at the conference and the feedback received both verbally and in writing was extremely positive and encouraging. I would like to extend my thanks to all who have contributed and helped to make the conference a success.

During this academic year we are planning to hold a number of workshops for which you will receive notification for registration by e-mail. I am looking forward to seeing you all there!

**Yours sincerely,**



**Dr. Said Masoud Ali Kashoob**

Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs  
Al-Musanna College of Technology  
Chairperson, OQNHE Executive Committee



# OQNHE ORGANIZES A WORKSHOP

## ON BENCHMARKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Oman Quality Network in Higher Education (OQNHE) organized a workshop in Benchmarking in the beginning of November 2015 at College of Banking and Financial Studies. Dr. Lee Sutherland, an expert in management and implementation of education and training projects presented the workshop. The event was attended by eminent personalities from different governmental and private institutions in the Sultanate.

The topics that were discussed included benchmarking in general, the importance of benchmarking, approaches to its application in different institutions and methods of benchmarking, to name a few. Moreover, the workshop included various teaching methodologies like individual and groups activities, group discussions and presentations.





Dr. Said Masoud Ali Kashoob, OQNHE Executive Committee Chair said: "Everyone seeks to improve their institutions and that is the reason why we always try to provide workshops and trainings represented by Omani and International experts in different areas to ensure better results and outcomes for the participants. The workshop discussed lot of valuable information in benchmarking and the response from the audience through the discussions, enquiries and activities was very encouraging".





## OQNHE 3<sup>rd</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

This country has seen great progress in the field of education under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Although we have come a long way, we still continue to face new challenges in a dynamic environment.

The third conference on Quality management and Quality Enhancement by Oman Quality Network in Higher Education comes at a very important time where many initiatives are taking place to reformulate the national strategy for the Omani education sector, most notably, Oman Education Council, Oman National Qualifications Framework, Institutional and Programs Accreditation, and Oman Research and Education Network. These initiatives are ambitious and collectively aim to transform the education sector in Oman and align it with 21st century standards.

The Oman Quality Network in Higher Education is a national network of Omani higher education institutions established in September 2006 with the specific aim of enhancing quality in education. Since its inception, this network has organized a number of conferences, workshops, seminars, and discussion forums. These events are a recognition of the importance of these activities and their necessity to advance quality in higher education. Our commitment to quality is strategic and this conference is another step on the path towards achieving our strategic national objectives. The conference in its previous editions has attracted many participants. Conference keynote speakers have been invited from different parts of the world including Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia and the Gulf region. The number of submissions to this conference has been

steadily growing.

This year the conference received papers and scheduled workshops on sharing best practices, quality teaching and learning, quality management systems, measurement and quality monitoring and the role of technology in quality assurance.

The keynotes speakers of the conference were:

Her Excellency Dr. Jawaher Al-Mudhahki, Chief Executive of The National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training, Kingdom of Bahrain

Professor Lee Keng-mun, Executive Director, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

Both keynote speakers, experts in the field of quality in HE, have been called to help the network to identify key trends, and challenges that will affect quality in higher education now and in the future.

Thanks and appreciation are due to the conference Chief Guest, His Excellency, Dr. Said bin Hamad Al Rabie, Secretary General of the Education Council.

Also, special thanks to Oman Academic Accreditation Authority and its CEO, Dr. Salim Razvi for their continuous support to this network.



# To Benchmark or not to Benchmark ?

## That is the question

Benchmarking has come to be regarded as an important quality enhancement mechanism in higher education and is being used both in Oman and internationally as one of the indicators for measuring the robustness of quality assurance systems in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Benchmarking finds its history in an old artisan method of measuring materials against a set standard or set of standards. The concept of benchmarking has been well known and widely used in business, and it has come to be used more recently in educational environments with the advent of quality assurance systems in HEIs arising from their need to be increasingly accountable for the quality of their output.

Benchmarking has actually been used for some time in HEIs when one considered the practice of external examining or external moderation. The purpose of much external moderation is to determine how one's students are faring in relation to an external peer's standards. As such, external moderation is one important benchmarking mechanism and quality enhancement tool that should be widely used in HEIs.

The type of benchmarking undertaken in the process of external moderation is one example of a norm-referenced approach where one or more institution is compared to another or others. There is also a criterion-referenced approach where an institution's performance is measured against a predetermined set of standards. An example of this approach

would be institutional accreditation where HEIs are being measured against a set of standards, rather than against other HEIs. There is yet another type of benchmarking that has also grown in acceptance in higher education, and that is the use of benchmarking to identify, and possibly emulate, best practice in a particular area. For example, an institution would like to revise its admission criteria. The institution would find it useful to survey the admission criteria and how they are applied at several other institutions in order to establish commonalities and efficiency within the sector. Benchmarking can also be coupled with target setting if the approach is aspirational where an institution aspires to match the practices of an institution that it deems to be first-rate or exceptional.

Like most assessments, benchmarking can be for formative or summative purposes. Most self-motivated benchmarking is generally formative and collegial, and aims to develop and improve current practices, while the production of the infamous University League Tables that strikes fear into the hearts of many, accounts for a summative or competitive approach to benchmarking. Albeit that benchmarking is sometimes associated with increased accountability and managerialism in higher education that many academics resist, it remains a powerful tool for quality enhancement if used appropriately and for the right reasons.



**Dr. Lee Sutherland,**

an expert in management and implementation of education and training projects



## THE RISE OF QUALITY MENTORING AT GULF COLLEGE

Embracing the global commitment to Quality Assurance and Enhancement, the Faculty of Foundation Studies (FFS) of Gulf College (GC) has interacted closely with the other HEI's in the furtherance of quality mentoring in the country.

Dubbed as the GC Mentor-Mentee System (GC-MMS), FFS has gone full force into unlocking the transformative nature of this multilateral system that covers Levels 3-6. It offers new staff, both local and foreign, an effortless entry into the Foundation Programme supporting the Administration, Management, Business and Computing departments.

GC-MMS unravels the process of dismantling the cumulative weight of tasks that literally burden new staff and henceforth, enforces Line Managers, Award Leaders, and Module Leaders to work collaboratively in ensuring that their mentees are meticulously guided throughout the semester to bring out the best in them. Using a well-planned checklist that unfolds the multifarious tasks, the mentors employ distinctive strategies to fully engage their mentees in all the activities that they are required to engage in.

New staff is given the opportunity to have informal discussions with their mentors for a better understanding on varied topics including the history of GC, education and culture of Oman, academic rules and regulations, award and assessment boards, moderation processes, tutoring systems, feedback systems, evaluation procedures, course and module materials, communication channels, research, health insurance, and others.

Interestingly, GC-MMS has provided a mechanism to identify new staff's expertise which could complement the experience of the senior staff for a greater impact on GC's undertakings with OAAA, ISO, and OQNHE. This strategy has created enthusiasm among mentors and mentees to prepare and equip the students with the skills and knowledge required to meet the demands of their academic and workplace requirements.

### Dr. Agnes

Manager, Centre for Research and Entrepreneurship

Gulf College

## **TEST BLUEPRINT: A BUILDING BLOCK OF A QUALITY CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT**

Mastery learning or mastery of the standards through classroom assessment has been an integral and vital part of students' learning. This suggests the view that the purpose of assessment is not only to measure students' achievement but rather to serve as a tool of learning which drives and enhances a positive and dominant impact on student learning.

When the process of quality assessment is properly executed then this would create an array of life-long learning implications among the students. Having said so, teachers are expected to have a substantial and professional knowledge and skills on how to prepare tests that are valid, comprehensive, fair, and reliable. In this case, teachers are literally not only "test writers" but also "dynamic leaders" who could influence improvements in the assessment practices of the educational system. The teachers' extent of knowledge and skills on assessment should therefore be further investigated and if there has been a gap then it could be remedied through staff development programs and training opportunities. Effective assessment should be given emphasis in higher education in order to prepare students to become more productive and competent individuals. This requires the HEIs to re-examine their assessment paradigm. The most effective way of changing how and what students learn is to change the way teachers assess them. Classroom assessment practices are changing as the nature of teaching and learning changes.

Classroom assessment creates a ripple effect on instruction. Good teaching and classroom assessment should be mutually linked, properly matched, and interrelated. They align, inform and facilitate each other. Classroom assessment has three stages: (i) Designing Classroom Assessment, (ii) Delivering Classroom Assessment, and (iii) Making Decisions and Appropriate Actions based on assessment insights. Designing classroom assessment could be achieved using a building block of quality classroom assessment called test blueprint to ensure a strong foundation of quality indicators that include validity, comprehensiveness, fairness, and reliability. It

is described as a two-way chart that shows the structure of a test consisting of the instructional objectives and its corresponding cognitive level, the content areas or coverage, the duration of the test, the ratio between Low-level and High-level thinking skills, the number of items or points in each content area, and the types of test items. The format and parts of a test blueprint may vary depending on the specific and pre-defined needs of the department or institution. (ii) Delivering the exam is crucial as it may affect the overall reliability of the exam. Hence, there is a need for strict invigilation policy and procedures. (iii) Reliable results of assessment may be used to drive planning for corrective instruction and decision-making. Evidence of student learning may be utilized for the improvement of instruction or educational processes in higher education and may also provide a valid evaluation of student learning.

**"Assessment doth make learners  
of us all"**  
— William Shakespeare

The Department of Information Technology, Higher College of Technology, Muscat has been utilizing such a test blueprint called the Table of Specifications in preparing classroom assessments since ٢٠١١ with successive iterations and improvements i.e. from test blueprint using paper-and-pencil to a simplified test blueprint using spreadsheets. Currently, a web-based test blueprint is in the design stage to accommodate a more user-friendly test blueprint. Moreover, the department adheres to the rigid moderation procedures, result analysis procedures, invigilation procedures, and tight exam policies of the College.



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IS Specialization Sub-Committee  
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# **IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Governance is a highly emphasized area for organizations of every kind. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as Universities/Colleges play an important role of providing public service of quality education, research, innovation and opportunities. The governing bodies of the HEIs are responsible for ensuring that these objectives are met through their system of governance and executing their roles effectively. The expectation from governing bodies entails determining an overall strategic direction for the institution which is embedded at every organizational level; safeguarding and managing effective usage of funds for the HEIs; distributing appropriate levels of authority and responsibility across the organization structure; protecting the interests of all stakeholders; maintaining appropriate quality, academic and ethical standards.

A shared model of governance is seen more applicable to the HEIs. The governing bodies are accountable for strategic areas and decision-making, whereas the management is responsible for implementation of the strategic directions and academic standards. The two cannot work in a vacuum but in an integrated model that has the attitude of acceptance and inclusiveness. The governing body should comprise of independent members with expertise and experiences,

not involved with day-to-day responsibilities of the organization. The governing body may have a non-voting representation from appointed staff and student to ensure that all interests are voiced. The governing bodies work effectively through a committee culture. As the meetings

of governing bodies are limited, formation of standing committees in various areas such as risk management, internal audit, facilities management, human resource development etc. support in effective decision.

A governing body can ensure its effectiveness by regularly planning review for itself internally and through externally facilitated mechanisms. Internally, the governing body has to reflect on achievement of its key performance indicators set for the institution measured against the strategic directions and benchmarked against other institutions. External review on the governance may be taken once every five years for getting a more objective view on their functioning.

Countries such as Scotland, Netherlands, Ireland and some of the individual universities have established code of corporate governance for assisting in proper management of universities. In comparison, Oman began its regulatory approach to Quality Audits only since 2008 and the Institutional Standards Assessment is expected to start from 2015 which is relatively new in the regulatory process. Even though the Institutional Standards Assessment Manual provides the description and criterion requirements on governance against which the HEIs will be measured, there is no code of governance for HEIs in the country, and thus the Universities and Colleges are left open to interpretation of this area. The HEIs will be greatly supported in developing an effective governance structure if a code of governance maintained as "comply or explain" basis is made available. This will surely have a phenomenal outcome in the proper management, development of quality education and increasing the competitiveness of the institutions.



**Dr. Menila James**  
,Director of Quality Assurance  
Muscat College



**Ms. Tamanna Dalwai**  
,Deputy Director of Quality Assurance  
Muscat College

## OQNHE Upcoming Events

1. The AGM and the executive committee elections
2. The practice sharing workshop with a focus on institutional standards assessment.
3. A workshop about the effective use of institutional data for enhancing quality management to be held at the ministry of higher education on May 2016.
4. Other workshops are in the planning stage for the coming academic year.
5. The fourth OQNHE conference on quality management and quality enhancement in higher education is planned for February 2017.

# EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

2014-2016



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