# Oman Accreditation Council

# Report of an Audit of the Higher College of Technology

**January 2010**

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P.O. Box 1255
P.C. 133
Al-Khuwair
Sultanate of Oman
Ph +968 2461 4361
Fax +968 2461 4364
http://www.oac.gov.om

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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 Accreditation Council (OAC) of Higher College of Technology (HCT).  It comments on HCT'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 HCT's activities, and constructive feedback to HCT to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The quality audit commenced with HCT undertaking a self study of its mission, vision and systems.  The results were summarized in its *Quality Audit Portfolio* (the 'Portfolio').  This document was submitted to the OAC by the due date of 15 December 2008.

The OAC 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 conference) on 26 January 2009 to consider HCT's Portfolio.  Following this, the Audit Panel Chairperson and Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to HCT on 18 February 2009 to clarify a number of 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 through newspaper advertisements and the OAC website about the quality of HCT's activities.  No submissions were received.

The audit visit took place over 22-24 March 2009.  During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 110 people, including representatives from governing authorities, staff, students, recruitment agencies and external stakeholders.  They also visited a selection of venues and reviewed additional materials.

No information provided after 24 March 2009 (being the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit, other than pre-existing items specifically requested by the Panel in advance.

This Report contains a summary of the Panel's findings, together with formal commendations where good practices have been confirmed, affirmations where HCT's ongoing quality improvement efforts merit support, and recommendations where there are significant opportunities or improvement not yet being adequately addressed.  The Report aims to provide a balanced set of observations, but does not comment on every aspect of HCT's activities.

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAC Board.  This Report was approved for release by the OAC Board on 23 January 2010.

The OAC was established by Royal Decree No. 74/2001.  Among its responsibilities is the external review of higher education providers (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman.  For further information, visit the OAC website (http://www.oac.gov.om).  Full details of the quality audit process are available in OAC's *HEI Quality Audit Manual* (available from http://www.oac.gov.om/institution/audit/ ).

## HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Each OAC 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 interesting because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly sections 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 result; 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. 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.oac.gov.om.

This Report contains a number of references to source evidence submitted by the HEI during the Quality Audit. These references are for the HEI's benefit in further addressing the issues raised. In a number of 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*

The Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Muscat is the second largest HEI in Oman with nearly 7300 students (Portfolio, p.11).  It is one of seven Colleges under the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) in the Sultanate of Oman.  The institution was originally established in 1984 as the Oman Technical Industrial College and was renamed the Higher College of Technology in 2001.  HCT offers Certificates and Diplomas  and, in some disciplines Higher Diplomas, and Bachelor of Technology degrees (B.Tech.) within seven academic departments: Engineering, Information Technology, Applied Sciences, Business Studies, Pharmacy, Photography and Fashion Design.  Its also has an English Language Centre.

The HCT Quality Audit Portfolio demonstrates a comprehensive effort of self-evaluation that addresses the relevant areas of the Quality Audit Scope as indicated in the OAC's *Quality Audit Manual*.  Overall, the Portfolio is well put together and shows that HCT is prepared to evaluate rather than just describe itself.  The document is well laid out, comprehensive and detailed. The sections identifying 'Opportunities for Improvement' are particularly valuable and appropriate and show that HCT is aware of the importance of self-evaluation. The Panel was informed that the Portfolio was written by a QA team formed by the Dean.  Data was collected from different departments and drafts were sent out for review to the departments and the MoM's central Quality Assurance Department (QAD).  During the visit, the Panel sensed that there was an overall awareness of the Portfolio amongst the staff but their involvement in preparing it had been minimal.  The Panel found that a quality assurance culture is being developed in terms of increasing awareness of its importance, the on-going systematic cycle of self-evaluation procedures, and quality assurance officers that are part of the organisational structure of the College.  The College now needs to ensure that all stakeholders feel they have a vested interest in its quality assurance activities.

A Strategic Plan was developed centrally for 2006-2008 and provided common strategic objectives for all seven Colleges of Technology.  A new plan (2009-2012) was under development at the time of the Audit Visit with HCT framing its own sub goals.  While the Panel supports this initiative, it recognises that the current approach to financial planning will need to be reviewed in order to support the College's strategic direction.  HCT also needs to develop appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) in line with its new sub goals and to implement its plans to improve data collection and analysis.

HCT is in the process of developing its systems to support student learning by coursework programs.  A list of graduate attributes has been devised and now needs to be covered in the program outcomes and assessment mechanisms.  The development of a Pedagogical Framework is a positive step in the direction of improving teaching quality and now needs to be embedded in the College, communicated to all teaching staff and incorporated into teaching and learning activities.  HCT needs to review its approach to tackling issues with student retention and progression and develop a formal system for collecting and analysing feedback from employers. The College is aware that engagement with both industry and the community is an important part of its mission and has plans to formalise its collaboration in these areas. The Panel found examples of existing mechanisms for collaboration such as consultative committees and provision of short courses for industry.  HCT could build on these positive initiatives to ensure that this area is consistently developed throughout the institution.

HCT considers academic support services to be essential for a successful learning experience and a new Student Information System has been developed to support the registration and student tracking processes. The College has also recently invested in new library facilities and is expanding its English Language Centre facilities. However, it is clear that academic support resources are stretched in the face of a rapidly increasing student population. HCT needs to review its current provision in order to ensure that learning resources are being deployed effectively and that these are available to all members of the student population. The College is aware of the challenges faced in the provision of student support services and needs to develop and implement strategies to support improvement in this area.

Recruitment and staffing policies are developed at Ministry level for all Colleges of Technology. The College recruits directly through the Ministry (primarily for administrative and support staff) or through recruitment agencies (for teaching staff). While the management of the College is aware of the issues in the area of staff and staff support services, there is a sense that there is limited control over the process at institution level. This is reflected in the lack of an overall HR plan although the College intends to adopt a more proactive approach in the future. The Panel was informed that HCT values its staff and is aiming to develop ways to improve staff morale and recognise staff achievement. The Panel supports the College's efforts in these areas, especially if these are developed as part of an overall improvement plan in order to achieve its Strategic Goals.

HCT has made a commitment to providing trained human resources for Oman and has endeavoured to maximize opportunities for technical education for the increasing number of school leavers. The College's significant growth in student intake over the last few years, however, has put a strain on teaching facilities and resources at the College. While HCT is aware of this, and further building development is taking place (for example with the building of a new English Language Centre), the College needs to be given greater flexibility to manage its growth especially in terms of resource provision, library facilities, IT infrastructure, student accommodation and student activities.

## *Summary of Commendations*

A formal commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

## *Summary of Affirmations*

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

## Summary of Recommendations

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

# 1    GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

HCT, along with the six other Colleges of Technology, comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Manpower (MoM).  The College is governed by the Board of Trustees which is chaired by the Undersecretary of Technological Education and Vocational Training.  The governance and management of the College involves a fine balance between centralised decision-making and decisions that are made at the level of the College.  This has implications particularly in the areas of financial control, resource provision and staffing which are discussed in the sections below.

## 1.1    *Mission, Vision and Values*

The vision, mission and values, developed in 2004/2005, are common to all seven Colleges of Technology.

The Colleges' vision is:

> *"The Higher College of Technology intends to become the "College of Choice" for students and for the industry by providing demonstrably high quality teaching, learning and research that makes a significant contribution to ongoing national economic development" (Portfolio, p.12)*

The vision makes reference to the role of research in the Colleges' activities.  HCT acknowledges that the vision, mission and College objectives (as laid out in the College Bylaws) are not entirely compatible in this area (Portfolio, p.17).  HCT needs to align its approach to research to its core focus (see Chapter 4 and Recommendation 13 below).

The Colleges' mission is:

> *"The mission of the Higher College of Technology is to achieve and sustain a strong reputation for excellence in teaching and learning. The College is dedicated to the delivery of high quality technical education and aims to produce graduates who have the professional and personal skills to enter employment with confidence, contributing effectively to the Sultanate's ongoing economic development" (ibid, p.12)*

HCT, along with the other Colleges of Technology, states that is supporting the following core values in pursuit of its mission: Professionalism, Integrity, Accountability, Flexibility, Creativity, Tolerance and Teamwork and Communication (Portfolio, p.12).  While these values are admirable, the Panel was unable to find specific evidence to show how these values are explicitly embedded in HCT's activities.

As the vision, mission and values were centrally developed through the MoM, there was little sense of shared ownership amongst the members HCT community. The College needs to ensure that these are clearly communicated and to enhance the links between the overall vision and mission and the vision and mission of the various departments which the Panel considered. They also need to be reviewed and monitored to ensure that they are effectively guiding the College.

## 1.2    *Governance*

HCT's first Strategic Goal is:

*To achieve excellence in governance and administration, and act at all times according to strong ethical principles. (Portfolio, p.12)*

All seven Colleges of Technology are governed a Board of Trustees (BoT) chaired by the Minister of Manpower. It includes the Undersecretary for Technological Education and Vocational Training, the Director General for Technological Education, two of the College Deans as well as representatives from other Ministries, government agencies and industry. The BoT meets four times a year. The Panel was informed that the Board of Trustees makes policy decisions in line with the College Bylaws, e.g. setting general policies (which apply to all the Colleges) and approving the Colleges' educational system and curricula. The decisions of the Board of Trustees are informed by breadth and depth of knowledge and experience of its members, who are drawn from all walks of life. Industry, commerce, government, international academia, local interests are all represented. The Board is aware of its responsibilities in seeking to match the skills acquired by students from the Colleges with the needs of the various industries operating in Oman. According to the Bylaws the BoT also have a role to play in the appointment of senior positions but the Panel was unable to find evidence that this takes place.

The seven Deans of the Colleges of Technology are all members of the Deans' Council. The Deans' Council meets on a regular basis to discuss common operational and academic issues and passes recommendations to the BoT. Each College has a College Council which is comprised of the Dean, Assistant Deans, Heads of Department and three representatives from the private sector. The College Council is responsible for implementing plans and decisions within each College.

The BoT and the Deans' Council oversee the governance and management of the Colleges of Technology as a whole, rather than dealing with individual institutions. HCT does differ from other Colleges in terms of its location, size and programs offered and therefore needs to be supported by a system to address the specific issues faced by the College. HCT recognises the opportunity for improvement in this area (Portfolio, p.19) but while the Panel found this to be a positive sign, there was no comprehensive mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the current governance and management structures and no clear action plans to address issues in this area.

> **Recommendation 1**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop and implement a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of its governance and management systems which results in clear action plans.**

### 1.3    Management

The Dean, along with the College Council, is responsible for management, the day to day running of the College, and dealing with staff and students (Portfolio, p18). HCT lays out a clear organizational structure with associated management responsibilities. The Dean is supported by three Assistant Deans covering areas of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Administrative and Financial Affairs. The Panel was informed that the present Dean was newly appointed at the time of the Audit Visit, having been in place since June 2008.

HCT acknowledges that there is scope for evaluating the effectiveness of the College management (Portfolio, p.19) but no system is currently in place to do so. In interviews, staff told the Panel that they found the current system bureaucratic with lengthy approvals processes leading to delays in decision-making and the provision of resources. These delays were found to have a negative impact on the successful running of the College. HCT needs to review its current process for approvals in order to support the achievement of its strategic objectives.

Recommendation 2

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher Colleges of Technology review its current approvals process to accelerate the decision-making process.**

### 1.4    *Institutional Affiliation for Programs and Quality Assurance*

HCT is one of the seven Colleges of Technology under the umbrella of the Ministry of Manpower.   Its quality assurance management system is supported by the central Quality Assurance Department (see section 1.10 below).   Apart from this, the College has no official institutional affiliation with other educational organisations for programs or quality assurance.

### 1.5    *Strategic Plan*

The 2006-2008 Strategic Plan, common for all seven Colleges of Technology, was developed during a workshop of management and staff, facilitated by the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) of the MoM.   It was approved in 2005.   While the Panel recognizes that there was an expectation on the College to cascade the Strategic Plan, it appeared that staff believed that the QAD had the responsibility for writing the HCT Strategic Plan rather than HCT.   The Panel found very little awareness of the current Strategic Plan during its Audit Visit and little sense of ownership.

The Panel was informed that a new Strategic Plan for 2009-2012 is being developed.   The eight strategic goals for all seven Colleges have remained essentially the same although research is no longer included.   The new plan now needs to be clearly communicated to the HCT community and a sense of ownership created.   Each College is now responsible for developing its own sub goals linked to the overarching Strategic Plan and the Panel was informed of plans to maximise HCT staff participation in the setting of these sub goals.   This initiative is supported by the Panel.

Affirmation 1

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's plans to develop its own sub goals in relation to the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan, adopting an approach to involve full staff participation.**

In its Strategic Plan, HCT states that it aims to serve the labour market needs of the national economy, while nurturing a set of core values in its students that promote both academic and professional excellence at the HCT.   Assessment of goal achievement via key performance indicators (KPIs) for each operational domain provides a useful template to track institutional activities to reach the goals set out.   KPIs in relation to the Strategic Plan were developed in 2008 although the Panel found no data to suggest that these KPIs are in use.   The KPIs should be clearly aligned to the strategic goals and used to measure results and track progress towards achieving both strategic and subgoals, enabling learning and continuous improvement.

### 1.6    *Operational Planning*

Operational goals are guided by a Strategic Plan that ties the institutional mission to specific objectives/goals.   Each department prepares an operational plan based on the Strategic Plan of HCT (Portfolio, p20).   Operational plans are however new and there are no results yet to evaluate their effectiveness. The Panel reviewed samples of operational plans but did not get the sense that there is any consistency or communication between academic and administrative departments.

Improvements in both strategic and operational planning would result in better achievement of objectives.   Annually reviewing the Strategic Plan top down, would enable operational plans to

be developed bottom up by departments and then integrated into an the overall College annual operating plan, with any inputs from internal or external reviews.

### Recommendation 3

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop and implement a systematic approach to operational planning for all academic and administrative departments.**

## 1.7     Financial Management

Goal 6 of the Strategic Plan states: *"To ensure that financial planning and management follow well-defined rules, procedures and standards"* (Portfolio, p.12).  The allocation of funding to the College is based upon historical funding levels rather than upon the actual number of students receiving tuition.  The budget is decided by the MoM based on the expenditure of the previous year and the HCT management has little flexibility in how the financial resources are allocated. The Panel was informed that there was no system of long-term financial planning in place.

The student numbers allocated by MoM to the HCT do not bring with them a proportional unit of resource to the College.  It was learned that an increased number of students allocated to register with the HCT was discovered by the College very late before the start of the academic year in September.  This situation does not lead to the possibility of realistic forward planning or efficient management of the College resources.  There needs to be an explicit link between the strategic planning, student intake and financial planning, so that resources are used to address and further key strategic objectives.

### Recommendation 4

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends, as the Higher College of Technology will be developing its own sub goals for the Strategic Plan, that appropriate financial planning systems are developed and implemented in order for the College to make independent decisions in line with its strategic direction.**

## 1.8     Risk Management

HCT has an implicit approach to risk management and recognizes that it needs to have a formal risk management system in place (Portfolio, p.22).  The College needs to develop short, medium and long term plans for facilities which address issues related to environmental health, safety and risk management, facilities planning and design, materials management, and the physical premises. The draft of the new Strategic Plan goals indicates under goal 8 that: "We will ensure that College facilities are well managed, effectively used, and developed innovatively."  HCT has plans to develop a taskforce and train staff to implement this goal.  The Panel supports HCT's efforts to establish a risk management system.

### Affirmation 2

**The Oman Accreditation affirms that the Higher College of Technology need to incorporate risk management into its management and planning systems and supports its efforts in developing its approach to risk management.**

## 1.9     Policy Management

HCT's policies are presented in the College's Quality Assurance Manual.  With the growth of HCT, the College's policies and procedures will be on the increase.  These need to be disseminated to guide faculty, staff and students in the day to day operations of the institution.

This could be supported by drivers such as an internal policy management committee. The Panel was informed that there were plans to overhaul the current policy management system and agrees that an improvement in this area will support more consistent policy implementation throughout the College. HCT has identified a number of opportunities for improvement in policy management (Portfolio, p.24) and the Panel supports the initial efforts that the College has made to improve in these areas.

> **Affirmation 3**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's plans to improve the current policy management system and to ensure that it is clearly communicated and consistently implemented throughout the College.**

## 1.10    *Entity and Activity Review Systems*

As one of Colleges under the umbrella of the MoM, HCT comes under the central Quality Assurance Department (QAD) which oversees the quality management systems in all seven Colleges. A Quality Assurance Officer liaises between HCT and QAD. There was substantial evidence to show that the QAD is carrying out its role proactively and achieving concrete improvements, which is commendable. The QAD sees it role as providing help and assistance where wanted, providing training, carrying out audits, sharing good practice and promoting a quality culture. The Panel noted that a culture of self-awareness at HCT department level is being encouraged through the QAD's efforts. Department self-reviews are submitted and discussed with representatives of the QAD team. Suggested actions are followed up in subsequent meetings. Senior College staff spoke highly of the assistance they receive from QAD and such a successful link with the Ministry is of real benefit to the management and staff of HCT. The Panel considered this process to be a positive step in the foundation of the College's entity and activity review systems.

> **Commendation 1**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council commends the Higher College of Technology for developing, in conjunction with the Ministry of Manpower's Quality Assurance Department, a regular entity and activity review system.**

In order to support its current review system, HCT plans to establish a data acquisition and analysis system (Portfolio, p. 25). Use can be made of performance evaluation tools available on the market for institutional assessment, such as the Kaplan-Norton Balanced Scorecard. Due to the frequent reliance on survey questionnaire data to ascertain student/staff satisfaction and mission success presented in supplementary materials, data tables should be annotated with survey response rate and sampling technique used (e.g. convenience vs. structured/random selection) or some measure conveying how well the respondents represent the department or institution to allow accurate inferences. The Panel supports the College's plans in this area.

> **Affirmation 4**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's plans to develop and implement a robust and valid data collection and analysis system in order to improve the planning and the performance of the institution.**

## 1.11    *Student Grievance Process*

The College Bylaws provide the basis for handling student grievances but these only relate to appeals against marks. HCT has established a student consultative body comprising student representatives which meets periodically to communicate grievances (Portfolio, p.26). In the

supplementary material document, "Recommendations from the Self-Study", HCT recognises that there is a need to "establish formal procedures for addressing complaints of students for matters other than grades or disciplinary measures". While the Panel recognises HCT's intention to develop procedures in this area, it found that a formal documented process has yet to be established. HCT should now develop and implement an integrated student grievance system to address all areas of student concerns and ensure that it is clearly communicated to staff and students.

> **Recommendation 5**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology establish a transparent and systematic process to deal with student grievances that is documented and clearly communicated to all staff and students.**

## 1.12    *Health and Safety*

The health and safety of the HCT community is a very important consideration for the College (Portfolio, p.26). A Health and Safety Committee has been formed which is responsible for ensuring the implementation of health and safety polices and procedures throughout the institution  HCT has identified a number of opportunities for improvement and is developing plans to address these.  The Panel supports HCT's efforts in improving health and safety within the College.

> **Affirmation 5**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's efforts in identifying opportunities to improve the health and safety environment of the College and in developing and implementing plans to address these opportunities.**

## 1.13    *Oversight of Associated Entities*

HCT does not oversee any associated entities.

## 2       STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

HCT's approach to learning and teaching is articulated in the following goal:

> *Strategic Goal 2. To offer to all students high-quality teaching, learning and training opportunities in line with the requirements of the market needs, so as to provide society with graduates who are equipped with appropriate technical knowledge and personal/professional skills (Portfolio, p.12).*

The College is in the process of developing its systems to support student learning by coursework programs. A list of graduate attributes has been devised and now needs to be covered in the program outcomes and assessment mechanisms. The development of a Pedagogical Framework is a positive step in the direction of improving teaching quality and now needs to be embedded in the College and communicated to all teaching staff. HCT needs to review its approach to tackling issues with student retention and progression and develop a formal system for collecting and analysing feedback from employers.

### 2.1     *Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives*

HCT has presented a list of graduate attributes (Portfolio, p.28) which is derived from its mission and as a result of discussions with external stakeholders. An alternative list of graduate attributes is also included in HCT's Quality Assurance Manual. While the development of these attributes is a positive step in preparing graduates for their future employment contexts, HCT needs to decide on a single list which is clearly communicated to the College community. Although HCT claims that the graduate attributes presented in the Portfolio have been translated into objectives for each program, this translation is not explicit in the sample of program handbooks provided by the various academic departments. The Panel found a lack of awareness of HCT's graduate attributes during interviews with staff and students. HCT has described a number of generic assessment methods used but these are not specifically linked to the assessment of specific graduate attributes. HCT needs to review its graduate attributes and its assessment of them.

The Panel considered a sample of curricula from several academic programs and found that not all courses contained learning outcomes that were specifically stated in an operationally meaningful way. For the majority of Engineering, IT and Pharmacy courses sampled, learning outcomes were clearly listed in the curricula, but for other programs (e.g. Fashion Design, Photography and Applied Sciences) they were not. While HCT states that "the mapping of the content of each lecture to the outcomes" (Portfolio, p.29) is required, not all courses do this. HCT needs to ensure that all program learning outcomes meet industry needs as well as graduate attribute expectations, and ensure that the design of the course content delivers these. The College should clearly communicate to students the connection between course content and course and program learning outcomes in all fields of study.

> **Recommendation 6**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology ensure that the course content of all programs is clearly linked to the stated learning outcomes and the College's graduate attributes and greater efforts are made to communicate these to students.**

### 2.2     *Curriculum*

The current Certificate, Diploma, Higher Diploma and Bachelor of Technology programs were introduced in September 2003. The course curricula are the same for all seven Colleges of Technology, although HCT is the only College under the MoM to offer a Bachelor level

qualification. The current curricula were designed by Specialization Committees, formed by the Ministry, which include representatives from the teaching staff across the Colleges. HCT also offers specialized courses in Accounting (CAT), ICDL and CISCO Networking.

The Panel was informed that curricula are reviewed on an annual basis at department teaching staff level and their views are fed back to the Specialization Committees. One complaint from staff was that the process of approval for changes to the curricula was lengthy as it was handled centrally by MoM. The Panel could not find evidence of a clear College process for proposing changes to the curricula and suggests that a clearly-documented process is developed across all departments.

HCT carried out a benchmarking exercise in 2007 which compared the Civil Engineering, IT, Mechanical Engineering, Pharmacy and Applied Biology programs to Sultan Qaboos University and international institutions (Portfolio, p.35). Such initiatives are to be encouraged. In future, HCT could also include benchmarking against academic standards and level of achievement and encourage this practice throughout the College.

### 2.3     Student Entry Standards

Student Entry Standards are laid out in the College Bylaws. Any Omani student living in the Muscat region is eligible for entry into HCT provided they have completed the Secondary School Leaving Certificate and achieved the required marks. A Ministerial decision, issued on an annual basis, determines the number of students admitted and the minimum marks required which may vary from one year to another. Entry to all Colleges of Technology is handled through the Higher Education Admission Centre. Students are transferred from other Colleges of Technology to complete B.Tech. at HCT. There are three intakes a year. Students are given an entrance exam on arrival and the majority of students start in the Foundation Program.

Students are streamed at the end of Foundation as to whether they will initially enter Diploma, or B.Tech. programs. This is dependent on their TOEFL-equivalent score. Currently the TOEFL score is 390 in order to enter the B.Tech. program (or 500 if students decide to take the TOEFL outside the College). The principal focus on English language outcomes rather than other skills areas will need to be reviewed in light of the latest Foundation Program Standards (see section 2.4 below). HCT needs to develop ways to measure the effectiveness of its current screening for student entry standards and review its entrance exam on a regular basis in line with the requirements of the programs offered.

### 2.4     Foundation Program

The Foundation Program focuses on developing students' communicative competence in English and provides training in mathematics and IT skills (Portfolio, p.33). Annual intake into the Program is around 1750 students. Students in the Foundation program are supported through traditional teaching methods, the Self Access Centre and the Multimedia Centre. HCT is in the process of building a new English Language Centre to accommodate new teaching technologies.

Curricula are developed centrally through the Ministry and the Panel was informed by teaching staff that there was little flexibility in terms of content. There is an emphasis by HCT on preparing students for the in-house TOEFL exam in the final year of Foundation and the Panel found little interface with the specialisation programs. The Panel found that staff teaching on the Foundation program were not familiar with the national 'General Foundation Program Standards' that have been developed in Oman. HCT will need to ensure that its teaching staff are involved in the ongoing development of the Foundation Program in line with the learning outcomes outlined in the Standards

### 2.5    Teaching Quality

HCT emphasizes the importance of teaching and learning in the College. HCT has developed a Pedagogical Framework which represents its teaching and learning philosophy (Portfolio, p.37). This will provide a solid basis for teaching but now needs to be communicated to all staff and its implementation supported through professional development and performance planning. Although HCT outlines a variety of teaching methods in use, the Panel found from staff and students that traditional teaching approaches are still very much in place. As the staff-student ratio varies considerably from one department to another, HCT needs to evaluate its impact on student learning and teaching workloads. Students and staff were unhappy about the current split shift system which means that students have to attend classes in the mornings and later in the day.

HCT uses a combination of methods to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in the College (Portfolio, p.39) which provides a good framework for assessing teaching effectiveness. The Panel reviewed feedback that was provided to teaching staff on the basis of student feedback questionnaires and was informed that teaching staff discuss the results in teams and identify opportunities for improvement. There is evidence that the training workshops respond to this feedback and contribute to the ongoing improvement in teaching quality.

HCT needs to ensure that evaluation of teaching quality is handled consistently throughout the College. The Panel agrees with HCT that a centralized handling and analysis of feedback data will provide a more comprehensive overview of teaching quality. HCT could also look at other approaches to assuring teaching quality, such as peer observation and self-reports.

### 2.6    Plagiarism

The College Bylaws provide a definition of plagiarism and HCT submitted an overview of its approach to dealing with plagiarism in its supplementary materials. HCT recognizes that more needs to be done in educating staff and students on the importance of avoiding plagiarism. Only the English Language Centre (ELC) handbook contained any reference to plagiarism and no reference is included in any of the unit's quality sub-manuals. Although plagiarism cases are posted in the hallways around campus, the Panel found limited awareness of the importance of avoiding plagiarism amongst staff and students. There is no evidence to suggest that plagiarism is an issue taken seriously and this needs to be addressed.

> **Recommendation 7**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop and implement a consistent approach to dealing with cases of plagiarism and ensure that all students are fully aware of academic conventions.**

### 2.7    Student Placements

On the Job Training (OJT) is a key aspect of the technical education at HCT. Students are expected to undertake a minimum 8-week placement and can only graduate when they have completed this requirement. OJT is handled by a Head of OJT who is supported by a central unit in the MoM. There is a well-established system, with a useful OJT handbook and log books which clearly outline objectives and outcomes from OJT for the students. There exist procedures within the College which outline a framework for such training together with advice upon its monitoring and assessment. Staff acknowledge that students value the opportunity available for OJT, as such student placements in industry can lead to full time employment on graduation. The quality of training offered to students, its monitoring and assessment was found to be variable. It was apparent from talking to the students that monitoring procedures are not always followed and this matter requires attention from HCT.

HCT has a major problem finding places for students; some students only find OJT opportunities once they have finished their studies. HCT is working with the MoM to deal with this issue. The College acknowledges that the current OJT provision places extra workload on teaching staff and is planning measures to address this. HCT needs to develop a system for evaluating the overall effectiveness of its OJT, including its training for supervisors.

### Recommendation 8

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology review its current 'On the Job Training' provision in order to ensure that it is consistently handled by all departments and that its effectiveness is evaluated by all stakeholders.**

### 2.8   *Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation*

HCT claims to have an outcomes-based approach to assessment and both summative and formative assessment methods are used (Portfolio, p.42). The College Bylaws stipulate that 70% of the assessment will be based on the final examination. Comprehensive guidelines for assessment and internal moderation are provided in the College's Quality Assurance Manual. Students' results are recorded in the Student Information System (SIS).

HCT does not show clearly how the assessment methods are linked to learning outcomes (see section 2.1), for example through curriculum mapping and standard setting. The assessment system in the College is evaluated through exam moderation reports (for final tests), analysis of results, student appeals and random sampling. However, the Panel was unable to find evidence of how the assessment standards are quality assured or benchmarked externally. Apart from Pharmacy and Fashion Design programs, there is currently no external review of exams or external involvement in the moderation process. HCT aimed to introduce an external examiner system in September 2008 (Quality Assurance Manual, p.50). The College should aim to progress in this area as soon as possible to ensure that its academic standards are viewed positively, nationally and internationally.

### Recommendation 9

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Higher College of Technology develop and implement a system for benchmarking assessment standards along with a consistent approach to external moderation.**

### 2.9   *Academic Security and Invigilation*

The primary responsibility for academic security lies with the teaching staff who are responsible for setting and photocopying examination papers (Portfolio, p.44). Guidelines for academic security and invigilation are provided in the College's Quality Assurance Manual and the College Bylaws lay out the rules and regulations for dealing with malpractice in examinations. Although HCT states that there are plans for a "center for examination control" (Portfolio, p.45), these plans have not yet been developed. HCT does not have a mechanism in place to identify potential risk within its approach to academic security and no means for measuring the effectiveness of its current system. HCT needs to review the implementation of its academic security and invigilation procedures to ensure that there is a consistent, rigorous approach throughout all academic departments.

### Recommendation 10

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Higher College of Technology review its current system for monitoring academic security and invigilation in order to ensure that there is consistent, rigorous approach throughout the College.**

## *2.10*    *Student Retention and Progression*

The Panel reviewed data provided by HCT regarding its student retention and progression (Portfolio, p.45).  It was not easy to determine from the statistics of examination results the overall performance of students.  Student retention and progression is an area of concern at Certificate level, particularly amongst male students.  HCT acknowledges that students are taking longer than expected to pass at each level (Portfolio, p.47) but have yet to develop concrete plans to tackle this area.  Some majors (e.g. Civil Engineering, Accounting, HR, Software Engineering) have very small yields in terms of graduates (Portfolio, p. 97).

The lack of progression of students is also a cause for concern.  The Panel found that a significant number of students appeared to drop out of their courses without any knowledge of their further progress being available.  HCT indicated that there was an average dropout rate of 24% between 2003 - 2005 but there are no corrective measures in place to monitor and prevent students from dropping out.

A significantly higher number of female students progress to B.Tech. level.  Higher Diploma students from other Colleges come to HCT to finish their B.Tech. although there does not seem to be a planned, managed approached to the number of transfer students and HCT's ability to cope with this.  Though aware of the fact that the prescribed MoM enrolment mechanism circumscribes HCT's ability to manage its intake of transfer students, the Panel concluded that HCT is not paying sufficient attention to the current problems with student retention and progression and needs to develop corrective measures, especially for male students.

> **Recommendation 11**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology review the current trend with regard to students' retention and progression rates and develop corrective measures to address this problem.**

## *2.11*    *Graduate Destinations and Employability*

HCT offers Certificate, Diploma, Higher Diploma and B.Tech. as exit qualifications.  Between the years 2003-2007, 82% of students (Portfolio, p.67) registered on either Certificate or Diploma level qualifications.  The Panel was informed that there were plans to increase the number of Higher Diploma and B.Tech. holders.  The Board of Trustees has a proposed target for HCT of 15% of the graduates holding B.Tech., 75% holding Higher Diploma/Diploma qualifications and the remainder Certificate awards over the next five years.  To underpin this, HCT should carry out a gap analysis with employers and the industry in Oman to analyse the correlation between the qualifications currently being offered and what qualification are employers looking for, to inform HCT's strategic direction.

HCT started tracking graduate destinations in March 2008.  Data provided suggests that female graduates need more help finding jobs.  HCT is aware of the limitations facing female graduates in the job market and by offering programs such as Fashion Design is aiming to alleviate the situation.  HCT needs to continue its efforts to support female employment.  The Panel agrees that the establishment of an alumni database will help the College track graduate destinations (see section 5.5 below) and supports its efforts in doing so.

In order to have a better idea of the employability of its students, HCT needs to develop and implement a mechanism to elicit feedback from employers and industry on the quality of its graduates.  Employers' feedback will need to be used in the review and development of future programs and learning outcomes to ensure that these programs are fit for purpose.

**Recommendation 12**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology devise and implement a system to collect and analyze data from employers on their satisfaction with graduates in order to inform program review and development.**

## 3      STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMS

At the time of the quality audit, HCT did not offer research programs *per se* so this section is not applicable in this Report.

# 4       STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

HCT includes the following goal in the 2006 – 2008 Strategic Plan:

> *Strategic Goal: 8. To achieve and sustain a national and regional reputation for excellence in specialist technological and applied research of benefit to Omani society.*

This aim is supported by the College Bylaws article 2 "carrying out and publishing scientific and applied research for the benefit of the colleges of technology and the community" (College Bylaws, article 2). HCT acknowledges that its core business focus to date has been on teaching activities rather than research, focusing on providing technical education focus on preparing qualified people for the labour market.

## 4.1     *Research Planning & Management*

HCT "intends to establish a research culture among its faculty" (Portfolio, p.50) but acknowledges that a clearly articulated vision and policy and a plan to implement this are needed. Although research has not been included in the Strategic Goals for 2009-2012, HCT sees the need for a clearly articulated vision in relation to research and a plan to implement this. Management and teaching staff have mixed views as to the role of research in the College. Although HCT recognise this as an opportunity for improvement, there is currently no clear direction in this area. This direction now needs to be developed in consultation with the HCT community.

> **Recommendation 13**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology clearly define the role of research and consultancy in its institutional vision and develop a Strategic Plan to implement and support this.**

## 4.2     *Research Performance*

HCT submitted a list of staff publications for the Panel to consider. A few staff members have been research active but within their own departments and independent of any overall College direction. Once HCT have clarified its research focus, staff publications and contributions can be seen as a measure of its effectiveness.

## 4.3     *Research Funding Schemes*

HCT indicated that there are currently no funding schemes for staff research and the research that is currently being carried out is being carried out on an ad hoc basis by individual staff members (Portfolio, p.50). The College needs to develop funding schemes for research in line with its future vision (see Recommendation 13 above).

## 4.4     *Consultancy Activities*

HCT "actively supports staff who want to engage in consultancy" as long as the consultancy takes place in the staff member's own time and helps to update professional knowledge (HCT Quality Assurance Manual, p.71). There have been a few small scale consultancy activities carried out by staff. The BoT and the College management expressed an interest in developing further consultancy opportunities with local industry and organizations. The Panel supports this in line with Recommendation 13 above.

### *4.5        Ethics and Biosafety*

According to the first Strategic Goal, the College aims to "act at all times according to strong ethical principles" (Portfolio, p.12).  HCT needs to develop ethics and biosafety policies in light of any future research activities.

### *4.6        Intellectual Property*

In line with Recommendation 13 above, HCT should develop a policy for respecting intellectual property which is communicated to all stakeholders.

### *4.7        Professional Development for Research*

Opportunities are provided for Omani teaching staff to be supported in professional development for research.  HCT could extend these to all staff, as part of its overall plans for professional development (see section 8.5 below).

### *4.8        Research Commercialization*

As HCT develops its approach to research and consultancy activities, it will need to consider its policies with regard to research commercialization.

### *4.9        Research – Teaching Nexus*

Although this area is not addressed in the Portfolio, once HCT has clearly defined its vision for research (see Recommendation 13 above), this needs to be articulated to its teaching and learning activities.

## 5        INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

HCT has clearly stated its intention in relation to industry and community engagement as:

*Strategic Goal 9. To foster an open and fruitful relationship with public and private sector organizations and with the community at large (Portfolio, p.12)*

The College is aware that engagement with both industry and the community is an important part of its mission and has plans to formalise its collaboration in these areas.  The Panel found examples of existing mechanisms for collaboration such as consultative committees and provision of short courses for industry.  HCT could build on these positive initiatives to ensure that this area is consistently developed throughout the institution.

### 5.1       *Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management*

HCT acknowledges that there is no centralised plan or management for industry and community engagement (Portfolio, p.51).   HCT has plans to channel its energies in this area through the Marketing Unit (see section 9.2).  Although this initiative is supported by the Panel, it was found that departments organise their own activities but these are not linked to a College-wide approach.  The Panel were informed that organisations were contacted by HCT staff from different departments and there was no overall strategy.  The Panel suggests that HCT involves stakeholders from different departments to play a role in planning industry and community engagement .  HCT also needs to establish mechanisms to measure its effectiveness in this area.

> **Recommendation 14**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop an inclusive College-wide approach to planning and managing industry and community engagement in order to fulfill the College's strategic goal in this area.**

### 5.2       *Relationships with Industry and Employers*

Representatives from industry and employers have been involved with all the Colleges of Technology through the Board of Trustees and through curriculum workshops in 2003 and 2007 (Portfolio, p.52).  A good example of industrial collaboration is the short course programme which is offered by certain departments and has the potential to be a real strength. Such schemes could provide an opportunity for a supplementary income stream if the College by-laws permit.

> **Commendation 2**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council commends the Higher College of Technology for supporting industrial collaboration through the provision of customised short courses.**

As mentioned above, from several discussions and interviews, the Panel gained the impression that within HCT the interface with industry varies from department to department and from industry to industry.  The Panel was informed that there are plans to start an external advisory board to engage with employers and keep channels open with the industrial sector.  A few departments have created consultative committees which comprise members from both the department and appropriate industries/employers.  Such committees allow both sides to be kept up to date with the developments and requirements of the other and collaboration of this nature should be encouraged in all departments.

Students expressed their interest in departments arranging regular visits to local industries and commercial organisations so that they could become familiar with working environments. Further visits by practising engineers, technicians and other workers would be appreciated by the students so that that could learn first hand about the world of work.

> **Affirmation 6**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's plans to strengthen and formalize the input of industry and employers through setting up external advisory boards in all departments.**

### 5.3    Relationships with Professions

HCT has active relationships with a number of professional bodies (Portfolio, p.54) and runs programs such as CISCO, Accounting and Fashion Design which are accredited by external bodies.  HCT proposes to expand its relationship and affiliation with professional bodies by engaging them in various aspects of College work through the different departments.  The Panel very much supports this effort but found that this initiative is still in its early stages.

### 5.4    Relationships with Other Education Providers

As one of seven Colleges of Technology, HCT has access to a network of institutions offering the same programs (up to Higher Diploma level) and facing common issues.  General meetings and workshops are held where representatives from institutions can share experiences and expertise. The MoM's Quality Assurance Department also plays a role in encouraging the sharing of good practice between the Colleges.  Associations with overseas institutions have been established centrally through the Ministry, but not by individual institutions such as HCT.

HCT maintains informal relationships with other HEIs in Oman, such as Sultan Qaboos University.  The Panel supports HCT's intentions to actively engage with other institutions through the Oman Quality Network in the future.

### 5.5    Relationships with Alumni

HCT recognizes the importance of its relationships with alumni and has plans to strengthen ties with them.  HCT has plans to set up an Alumni Unit within the Marketing Unit and to communicate with alumni through newsletters and a dedicated web page. HCT has recently developed an alumni database and has begun to collect data on its graduates which should be used to inform graduate destinations (see Recommendation 12 above).  The Panel supports HCT's efforts in creating links with its alumni and developing means to measure the effectiveness of these.

> **Affirmation 7**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's efforts to strengthen ties with its alumni.**

### 5.6    Relationships with the Community at Large

HCT aims to encourage internal and external community activities, such as Open Days and hosting events for professional organizations.  HCT recognizes that it does not have an "identified process" for organizing, improving and gauging the effectiveness of these activities (Portfolio, p.56).  This was confirmed by the Panel in its meeting with staff and representatives from the local community.

Since HCT draws primarily on graduates from secondary schools, building constructive relationships with such institutions through activities such as faculty visits and annual fairs is important. The Panel found that the schools approach HCT rather than the other way round. HCT should adopt a more planned, proactive approach to developing its relationships with the community at large (in line with Recommendation 14 above).

**6		ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES**

HCT has two Strategic Goals which relate to the area of Academic Support Services:

> *Strategic Goal 3. To provide excellent services to students.*
> *Strategic Goal 4. To provide state of the art learning resources for students, and encourage students to develop their academic, vocational and social skills (Portfolio, p.12)*

HCT considers academic support services to be essential for a successful learning experience (Portfolio, p.58). A new Student Information System has been developed to support the registration and student tracking processes. The College has also recently invested in new library facilities. However, it is clear that academic support resources are stretched in the face of a rapidly increasing student population. HCT needs to review its current provision in order to ensure that learning resources are being deployed effectively and that these are available to all members of the student population.

*6.1		Academic Support Services Planning & Management*

HCT states that the academic support services are planned on the basis of projections of student intake and resources available (Portfolio, p.58). The Panel was informed that the projections for student numbers are made in the summer before the September intake which makes long term planning for academic support services difficult. HCT has plans to set up a centre for academic support services but this has yet to come into being. The Panel found that although there are plans for different sections of academic support services, there is no consistent approach to operational planning and management in this area. This is an area that HCT needs to address (in line with Recommendation 3 above).

*6.2		Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

Students are registered through a central Student Information System which has been designed and is managed by the Ministry of Manpower. Data is secured in a remote server and users have different levels of access depending on their roles. There are plans for online registration from September 2009. Any suggested changes to the system have to be submitted to the MoM.

According to staff, there have been delays in the response time to changes, but the Panel was informed that these have been due to problems setting up the new system. Comments during interviews suggest that HCT would like more autonomy over SIS but recognizes the need for the expertise to run it themselves. The system has the potential for providing data for statistical analysis which HCT proposes to instigate. HCT needs to develop a mechanism for measuring the effectiveness of the new system and to ensure that the central system responds to issues in a timely fashion.

*6.3		Library*

The library has been recently renovated and new facilities such as laptops, discussion rooms and electronic resources have been introduced. While these efforts are to be encouraged, having visited the library and spoken to the library staff, the Panel concluded that the library space and holdings are still clearly inadequate given the size of the student body. There is currently seating for 200 students from the student body of 7300 students and the library is understaffed. The provision of adequate library resources and the training of students will support the growth of a student research culture.

The library section has developed its own Strategic Goals which include implementation of the "Ebrary" system and monitoring of student usage. The College needs to consider how resources will be allocated to support the achievement of these goals

### Recommendation 15

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology review its current library facilities and IT infrastructure in order to fully support the needs of its learning community and in light of the rapidly growing student population.**

## 6.4    *Information and Learning Technology Services*

The information and learning technology services are centrally managed at HCT by the Educational Technology Centre (ETC). The ETC "is mandated to provide updated IT infrastructure, improved facilities for educational technology and learning resources support" (Portfolio, p.60). The ETC consists of three sections: the Computer Services Section (CSS); Educational Services Section and the Library Section.

The CSS is responsible for all aspects of IT provision and support. Servers are in place for all functional areas, an Oracle DB tracks equipment use, and a 3-level security system that is firewall-updated daily. A 60% wireless coverage for the campus complements the fixed-line infrastructure, and students can only access the wireless network after requisite software installation on their computers administered by computing services to ensure data security. Every maintenance/support action is logged by staff dedicated to each campus building. Satisfaction with services is monitored via regular user surveys and feedback collected from suggestion boxes. Given the limited resources at their disposal, the CSS achieves a commendable level of service. There is a clear IT policy and staff and students appreciated the responsiveness and support of the CSS staff.

### Commendation 3

**The Oman Accreditation Council commends the Higher College of Technology for establishing an efficient Computer Services Section which provides an efficient support service to the College community within the available resources.**

With approximately 200 computer stations in four open-access lab rooms serving the HCT student body, CSS is aware that not all students are able to access a computer when needed. HCT needs to review its current IT infrastructure provision to ensure that it is able to meet the needs of its staff and students (see Recommendation 15 above).

## 6.5    *Academic Advising*

Academic advising is provided by teaching staff and students are allocated advisors by Heads of Department. Students seemed generally satisfied with the academic advice they have been given. However, documentation reviewed by the Panel indicated that the approach to academic advising was inconsistent across departments and that staff workload has been an issue. HCT has developed an Academic Advising Handbook for staff and recognizes that more training for staff is needed.

The Panel agrees that HCT needs to monitor the effectiveness of academic advising, especially in terms of identifying 'at risk' students and supporting efforts to improve student retention (see section 2.10 above). HCT needs to implement appropriate actions to improve in this area.

**Affirmation 8**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's efforts to review and improve its current provision of academic advising in order to improve its teaching and learning processes and address the issue of student retention.**

### 6.6    *Student Learning Support*

HCT provides student learning support through its self-access center, computer labs and internet access.  The English Language Center (ELC) offers extra classes and activities for students who need further support with their language skills.

HCT acknowledges that the current learning support provided to students is limited by the lack of facilities and resources.  However, there are no plans in place to address the current limitations or mechanisms in place to measure the effectiveness of the current schemes in place to support students' learning.  Students expressed concern that the study space on campus was insufficient.  This is an area that HCT needs to address.

### 6.7    *Teaching Resources*

HCT aims to provide "state of the art learning services" and regularly evaluates the provision of its teaching resources through surveys for both staff and students (Portfolio, p.63).  New technology has been introduced in some departments and staff training has been provided.  A new English Language Centre is under construction which promises to provide updated facilities for this area.  The Panel supports HCT's efforts in this area.

However, with the rapid growth in its student body, HCT recognizes that current teaching resources are stretched, especially in terms of teaching space.  Interviews with students during the visit indicated a lack of scheduled class sections and insufficient laboratory space due to the number of students enrolled.  The Panel was also informed of delays in procurement of teaching resources.  These are areas that HCT needs to address.

# 7        STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

HCT's Strategic Goal 3 relates to the area of students and student support services:

*Strategic Goal 3. To provide excellent services to students (Portfolio, p.12)*

Student support services relates to the areas which are important to the overall well-being of students, which includes the monitoring of student satisfaction, medical and counselling provision, catering, accommodation and social facilities. The College recognizes that there are improvements to be made in this section (Portfolio, p.65). Lack of timely data on student intake makes long-term planning difficult and there are limited resources allocated to student support services. Whilst plans to overcome these shortcomings have been drawn up, there are neither strategies developed to implement these plans nor resources available to support these initiatives.

## 7.1      *Student and Student Support Services and Planning*

The planning and management of this area is the responsibility of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. This area includes receiving new students, dealing with transfer students, housing, student activities, and health and catering services. The services provided to students are planned according to student projections. For the September intake, the notification of student numbers is only provided shortly before the beginning of the semester, which makes planning very difficult. Students are also transferred to HCT from other Colleges of Technology to complete their B.Tech. degrees. The Panel reviewed plans developed by the Student Services Section to improve the services offered to students but these are not linked to implementation strategies, resource provision or timeframes. This area is seriously understaffed considering the size of the current student population. The College needs to review its current approach in this area to ensure that adequate student support services are provided to the student community.

> **Recommendation 16**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology review its current provision of student support services and develop and implement a planned, systematic approach to these areas which is supported by adequate resources .**

## 7.2      *Student Profile*

Data on the profile of the student body is provided by the central MoM Student Information System. Figures show that there are currently around 7300 students enrolled, with 65% on diploma or degree programs. Nearly all students are Omani. The student intake is fairly evenly divided in terms of gender, with around 48% female students joining the College between the years 2003-2007. Around 40% of the students are studying in the Engineering department (Portfolio, p.66).

Now that HCT has access to a centralized data system, this data should be used in order to develop a coherent database for class and student profiling. Such overall profiles can produce strong rationales for course design, curriculum design and admission qualifications. The College needs to adopt a rigorous and consistent approach to data collection and analysis (see Affirmation 4 above).

## 7.3      *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

HCT "strives to provide a climate that is conducive to student learning" (Portfolio, p.68). HCT has carried out two student satisfaction surveys in the areas of academic and student support

services. While these initiatives are a positive step forward, the Panel could not find evidence to show how the results have been analysed nor what action plans have been put in place to address the students' concerns.

The Panel had the opportunity to meet a number of students, many of whom expressed loyalty to the College and were happy with the overall educational experience. The lack of social facilities, the accommodation problem and the catering seemed to be the major issues for students, corroborated by the results of the student surveys. Students felt that mechanisms for feedback were lacking and there were only limited opportunities for their voice to be heard. HCT should consider providing more opportunities for students to be consulted in the College decision-making processes. HCT should take the opportunity to develop a regular system of surveys and develop tangible action plans that are clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

> **Recommendation 17**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop and implement a regular mechanism for developing action plans in response to survey findings which are shared with the College community.**

### 7.4     Student Behaviour

Student behaviour is governed by the College Bylaws. Students are given presentations during the induction week organised by the Student Services Department. HCT provides student handbooks which cover its expectations regarding student behaviour. The Panel considered a range of these produced by individual departments and found them to be inconsistent in the range of information they give to students, for example whether or not all the relevant College Bylaws are included. HCT needs to ensure that the rules and regulations governing student behaviour are made explicit to all students in a consistent fashion.

### 7.5     Career and Employment Services

Career and Employment Services are provided by HCT's OJT unit, linking employment services to student placement. HCT has taken part in Career Fairs and has provided workshops on "Job Search Techniques" which is compulsory for all students. Private sector companies interview prospective employees on campus and lists of students looking for work are sent to the Ministry of Manpower. The Ministry also maintains a job bank that catalogues employment vacancies and is accessible to students.

HCT does not have a planned approach to the provision of its career and employment services or any mechanisms in place for evaluating its effectiveness. The Panel was informed that there are plans to set up a Careers Center but these are in early stages of development. While the Panel supports this initiative, the alumni data on unemployed graduates suggest that students, especially female, would benefit from HCT taking a more proactive approach to the provision of career and employment services.

### 7.6     Student Finances

Students do not pay fees as HCT is a publicly-funded College. HCT has limited control over its students' financial allocations as they are funded directly by the government. The Panel was informed that some students are struggling financially, especially in terms of being able to find rented accommodation (see section 7.7 below).

*7.7      Accommodation, Catering and Transport*

HCT provides some accommodation for females students in College hostels.  The majority of students needing accommodation are given information and assistance in finding accommodation. Out-of-area students (i.e. those who live more than 100 kilometres from the College) receive a monthly allowance but have found this is too low for the high-cost area around campus.  The Panel was informed that a small number of students who cannot find accommodation are forced to leave their studies.  The College is aware of this issue and has submitted proposals to the MoM to address the difficulties students are having with accommodation.

> **Affirmation 9**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council affirms that the Higher College of Technology has identified the problem of student accommodation as a key area for improvement and supports the proposals submitted to the Ministry of Manpower to address this issue**

Catering is provided by a private contractor.  Student responses to the College survey on support services indicated that there was a very low satisfaction rate with the current canteen.  HCT plans to hire a nutritionist but also needs to consider the quality of the services provided by the current catering provider and review the process for selecting and monitoring future catering providers.

HCT acts as liaison between students and the companies that provide transport to and from the College.  The Panel found no issue in this area.

*7.8      Medical and Counselling Facilities*

HCT provides basic clinic facilities.  A survey carried out with students indicated that they were not fully satisfied with the medical services provided.  HCT recognizes that it needs to increase the size and extend the opening hours of its clinic.  The College needs to develop a planned, systematic approach to the provision of its health services and that these are reviewed on a regular basis.

HCT provides counselling services through the Student Affairs Department.  However, this facility is seriously understaffed and many students are unaware of the counselling services provided.  This is an area the College needs to address by recruiting enough appropriately qualified staff and developing appropriate procedures for handling counselling (see Recommendation 16 above).

*7.9      International Student Services*

HCT does not enrol international students.

*7.10     Social and Recreational Services and Facilities*

HCT claims to have formed a number of societies, clubs and groups. The Panel was informed, however, that no allocation for student activities is included in the annual budget.  Although HCT recognizes that the recreational services do not meet students' needs (Portfolio, p.72) there are no concrete plans to improve this area.  Students were unhappy with the current provision of social activities and the lack of space and facilities to accommodate social and recreational activities. HCT needs to review its recreational services and facilities in line with its objective in order to support its goal of developing students' social skills (Strategic Goal 4).  This area should be considered as part of the review of the current student services provision (see Recommendation 16 above).

**8        STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES**

HCT has the following strategic goal in relation to its staff and staff support services:

> *Strategic Goal 7. To develop its staff, offering opportunities for professional and personal growth and development, rewarding hard work and fostering leadership skills and innovative thinking.*

Recruitment and staffing policies are developed at Ministry level for all Colleges of Technology. The College recruits directly through the Ministry (primarily for administrative and support staff) or through recruitment agencies (for teaching staff). While the management of the College is aware of the issues in the area of staff and staff support services, there is a sense that there is limited control over the process of recruitment at institution level. This is reflected in the lack of an overall HR plan although the College intends to adopt a more proactive approach in the future. The Panel was informed that HCT values its staff and is aiming to develop ways to improve staff morale and recognise staff achievement. The Panel supports the College's efforts in these areas, especially if these are developed as part of an overall improvement plan in order to achieve its Strategic Goal.

**8.1      *Staff and Staff Support Services Planning***

Human Resource Planning is carried out at department level, in coordination with the Assistant Dean for Administration and Finance. HCT states that "the HCT system for HR planning and management is appropriate" (Portfolio, p.73) but there is no indication of how HCT measures effectiveness in this area as the College has no unified, strategic policy document that coherently lays out the HR approach to be applied. HCT management recognises the significance and impact of HR on the core activities of the College and plans to form a HR Steering Committee to review the current approach (Portfolio, p.73). However, there is no indication of how this will be achieved. HCT needs to develop a system to better inform current activities and provide a secure basis for future development.

> **Recommendation 18**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop and implement mechanisms to support long-term planning in staff and staff support services and that these are regularly monitored and reviewed.**

**8.2      *Staff Profile***

According to the figures presented, the College currently has 525 staff members, 362 of which are full-time academic staff (Portfolio, p.98). The gender mix for academic and administrative staff is around 50/50. The staff are from around 25 different countries, with the majority of the academic staff from India, the Philippines and Oman. Over 58% of the teaching staff have Master level degrees, around 20% are PhD holders and around 21% of staff are qualified to Bachelor's level. It is not clear how "the spread of qualifications among academic staff is aligned with the mission of HCT" (Portfolio, p.75) when the mission focuses on "strong reputation for excellence in teaching and learning"" (Portfolio, p.12). This potential mismatch between Bachelor level qualified teaching staff and the drive for excellence needs to be reviewed in terms of the evaluation of teaching quality and opportunities for professional development for staff.

The Panel noted that although the staff size has been growing over the past few years, the ratio of academic staff to total staff population is dropping. This trend should be carefully looked at by HCT administration as it can have a negative impact on staff workload and student-staff ratios.

HCT recognises the need to recruit more academic staff and more Omani faculty by improving their financial packages. HCT also plans to improve the calibre of support staff through better recruitment procedures and training of those already recruited.

## 8.3     *Recruitment and Selection*

HCT staff are recruited through different channels. Some staff are directly recruited through the MoM but the majority of expatriate teaching staff are found through recruitment agencies. According to the College Bylaws, the BoT should be endorsing appointments for senior staff but the Panel found no indication that this takes place. The Panel was informed that as recruiting through the Ministry of Civil Service is a lengthy process, agencies are used to accelerate the process. Currently, five agencies are engaged. They offer varying terms and conditions to their applicants. HCT departments send requirements to the MoM who revise and review the requirement and send the quotas to the agencies for all seven Colleges. Companies send CVs to the College which the HoDs review and select for interview. Applicants are either interviewed over the phone or by a Panel formed by the MoM.

Problems arising from recruitment through agencies include wide variation in financial packages, poor quality of screening of potential staff, and difficulties with staff turnover/projection (Portfolio, p.76). Since current procedures do not allow HCT full ownership of the recruitment process, packages extended to recruited staff may vary significantly which may be contributing to the high attrition rate in some academic departments. The College Bylaws indicate that the Head of HR does not have any proactive role in the recruitment process but merely a coordination role with the various centres and departments in identifying the HR needs.

The Dean and the Heads of Department need to have a greater role in the recruitment and selection of their own teaching staff. This in turn would encourage the management of the College to have greater responsibility for developing staff they had helped to appoint. It was reported that: "With regards to staffing, it has been observed that some staff members have been assigned positions not commensurate with their experiences, qualifications, and/or level of commitment" (Portfolio, p.19). HCT needs to address its current recruitment and performance management system to review this.

The Panel was informed that the inequities of the current recruitment process have been identified as a serious issue and that a proposal has been submitted to set minimum standards for recruitment policies and packages. The Panel supports HCT efforts to improve in this area.

> **Affirmation 10**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council supports the Higher College of Technology's proposal to seek greater input in the recruitment process in order to standardise the approach to the recruitment, selection and promotion of all staff.**

## 8.4     *Induction*

HCT carries out staff induction in order to familiarize newcomers with the systems and policies of the College. Staff induction is usually carried out as new groups of staff join. Departments have produced staff induction handbooks but these vary in terms of comprehensiveness of information that is provided to staff.

HCT has identified the need to design a College-wide orientation program for new staff and prepare a unified staff induction manual which address class-room management, use of the SIS, grading system, advising, and conduct of examinations (Portfolio, p.78). HCT should also

develop a means to review the effectiveness of staff induction and the consistency with which it is handled across different units (see Recommendation 19 below).

### 8.5    *Professional Development*

HCT values professional development as an important and integral part of its operations to improve the skills of HCT staff in their workplace. Scholarships are provided by the Ministry for Omani staff to study abroad. For non-Omanis, the focus has been on in-house training as there are limited funds for training outside the College (Portfolio, p.78). A number of workshops and training sessions have been delivered and a needs assessment has been carried out. Survey results indicate that staff have been satisfied with the quality and usefulness of the training provided (Portfolio, p.79).

HCT states that it plans to establish a 'Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning' (Portfolio, p.80). The mission of the Center would be to promote and support high quality teaching and learning at HCT in keeping with its mission, "…to achieve and sustain a strong reputation for excellence in teaching and learning" (ibid, p.80). This is still at the planning stage and HCT have yet to secure funding for this initiative.

HCT has developed an active approach in this area and should use these positive steps as a springboard to develop a sustainable, planned approach to the provision of professional development for all staff. The Panel also noted that some workshops were delivered in English which meant that Arabic-speaking administrative staff were not able to attend. The College needs to ensure that training provision is accessible to all (see Recommendation 21 below).

### 8.6    *Performance Planning and Review*

HCT has developed an appraisal system for teaching staff which includes feedback from students, peers and seniors. The main aim is to identify areas for improvement and training needs for individual faculty (Portfolio, p.80). Although performance appraisal using a number of mechanisms is useful, the procedure for evaluation by peers and seniors is not clearly defined. The system lacks performance planning, for example by establishing targets for individuals at the beginning of the year.

HCT has not developed a consistent approach to the performance review of non-teaching staff. The Panel also noted that there is no well documented system for monitoring the Dean's or Assistant Dean's performance. While HCT recognises that the effectiveness of the appraisal system needs to be considered, it does not currently have a comprehensive and consistent performance planning and review system in place.

> **Recommendation 19**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop a planned, consistent and inclusive approach to staff induction, performance management, professional development, promotion, severance and all related areas which is implemented for all staff at all levels and is regularly reviewed.**

### 8.7    *Promotion and Other Incentives*

HCT has a two-tier promotion system. Staff recruited by the MoM are eligible for promotion based on the conditions set out by the Ministry of Civil Service whereas staff recruited by agencies are not eligible for promotion (although their employment package can be enhanced on HCT's recommendation). HCT should consider developing faculty promotion rules based on research, teaching as well as contribution and service to the institution and the community, which are unified and transparent to all academic staff. HCT needs to consider ownership of this

process being removed from the agencies and given to the College. Similarly clear promotion rules should be set for non-academic staff based on performance review and experience. While HCT "recognizes the need to have a promotion system applicable to all categories of employees within the organization" (Portfolio, p.81), there is no plan in place to develop such a system. An equitable promotion and incentive system needs to be established in order to support succession planning and the long term HR management of the College (see Recommendation 19 above).

In terms of incentives, HCT has set up an "Employee of the Month" scheme and plans to extend this to include all categories of staff. HCT could also consider other incentives to HCT staff such as a teaching excellence award or an annual research award. Reward does not have to be financial, it could be in the form of faculty release time, or at least may be accounted for in the workload and in academic promotion.

## 8.8 Severance

HCT's approach to severance involves the head of department sending a request to the HR department to terminate the services of a member of staff. Staff are sent warning letters prior to this. The HR department contacts the MoM or the recruitment agency which informs the member of staff in writing. Staff working within the three month probation period can be released without any warning letter. The Panel was informed that there is no appeals system in place.

HCT has acknowledged the need to improve the severance process by establishing clear procedures for it, with clear roles and responsibilities. However, there are no concrete plans to carry this forward. This is an area that needs to be addressed (see Recommendation 19 above).

## 8.9 Staff Organisational Climate

HCT has carried out surveys to monitor the staff organizational climate in relation to their satisfaction with HCT services. This is a useful initiative and in future results need to be analysed and action plans developed and communicated to all staff.

The management of the College recognized that staff satisfaction could be improved and was working on building the morale of the staff community. HCT plans on increasing number of members of staff recognized each month for their outstanding achievements. HCT also intends to increase staff satisfaction by improving general services, but it is not clear what plans are in place to do this. HCT could consider other approaches to creating a sense of a HCT community such as greater involvement in decision-making beyond department level and provision of opportunities for staff to express their views.

The Panel found no evidence to suggest that a system for dealing with staff grievances was in place. Although HCT is working to encourage staff to be active members of the College community, it also needs to provide them with a mechanism to air their grievances.

> **Recommendation 20**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology develop and implement a staff grievance system which is clearly communicated to all staff.**

## 8.10 Omanisation

HCT has been proactive in developing its Omanisation program. Omanis account for around 28% of teaching staff and 63% of support staff. New graduates are recruited through MoM and are offered opportunities to further their studies overseas. Support staff are often recruited from the HCT student body. The Panel met with a number of Omani staff who were appreciative of the amount of support they have been given.

HCT is planning a proactive approach to targeting prospective candidates in their places of study in Oman. HCT is also attracting more Omanis as part-time teaching staff as there is a difficulty hiring them for full-time positions due to the relatively low financial packages. However, the active steps taken to advance Omanisation are very commendable. HCT should clearly integrate this area into its overall HR Planning framework.

**Commendation 4**

**The Oman Accreditation Council commends the Higher College of Technology for its proactive approach towards the Omanisation of its teaching and support staff.**

# 9        GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

HCT has the following Strategic Goal in relation to this area:

> *Strategic Goal 5. To ensure that College facilities are managed well, effectively used, and developed innovatively (Portfolio, p.12)*

General support services and facilities include administrative support, financial support and HR support.    Administrative support includes provision of equipment, furniture, building maintenance, parking and security.  With the growth in student numbers over the last few years, general support services and facilities have been considerably stretched.  The College needs to develop operational plans and review its resource allocation in order to ensure that this area can continue support its core activities.

## 9.1      *General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management*

Planning for this area is embedded in the preparation of the College budget and annual development plans.  This area is supervised by the Assistant Dean for Administration and Finance, under the overall direction of the Dean (Portfolio, p.85).

One of the main obstacles to the efficient management of General Support Services and Facilities is the delay which College staff experience from time to time in receiving approvals or decisions from the MoM.  Such approvals are given and decisions are made by the Ministry but long delays can occur in transmitting this information to the College.

There is no clear short, medium and long term planning for facilities which should address issues related to environmental health, safety and risk management, facilities planning and design, materials management, and the physical premises. While HCT intends to manage its facilities well, as indicated in goal 8 of the Strategic Plan 2009-2012, the College needs to ensure that it has operational plans and resources in place to support the planning and management of general support services and facilities (see Recommendation 3 above).

## 9.2      *Public Relations and Marketing*

Public Relations and Marketing tasks are shared by HCT and the MoM.  This area is closely associated with the strategic goal for community and industry engagement (see Chapter 5 above). HCT has been involved in a number of activities which raises the profile of HCT in the community, such as participation in academic, cultural and sporting events (Portfolio, p.86). HCT acknowledges that these activities are not part of a planned, College-wide approach and therefore there is the potential for different messages and perceptions of the College to be delivered to its stakeholders.

HCT has formed a core marketing team and produced a draft Marketing Plan, actions which are to be supported.  In developing such plans, HCT needs to consider how it will review and measure the effectiveness of its activities.

## 9.3      *Communication Services*

HCT provides a wide range of communication services, including internet, intranet, data display systems on campus and a College website.  There is a wireless network but it has limited coverage on the campus.  These services were seen to be very effective and users spoke highly of these facilities. HCT should ensure that the technical staff who operate these services receive adequate training and development upon a regular basis.

There are no policies governing communication in the College or mechanisms for gauging the effectiveness of the current channels of communication. The College operates in both Arabic and English but there is no formal structure in place for ensuring that everyone is kept informed, e.g. Ministry directives are produced in Arabic, workshops and training delivered in English, QAD reports for departments are either in Arabic or English. There is the potential for members of the College community to be excluded. HCT needs to consider ways to address this, for example ensuring that all internal communication is in English and Arabic.

> **Recommendation 21**
>
> **The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Higher College of Technology review its internal communication and training policies in order to ensure that all members of the College community, whether English or Arabic speaking, are included.**

## 9.4    *Facilities Management*

HCT has been constantly developing and increasing its facilities to accommodate the increasing demands of its end users. These include maintenance, renovation of existing facilities and construction of new ones. HCT has identified the need for an integrated administration system for managing all College facilities and projects. The Panel supports the College's plans to streamline the current facilities management (Portfolio, p.89).

**APPENDIX A.    AUDIT PANEL**

Professor Riad Al Bayoumi (Panel Chairperson)
Department of Biochemistry
Sultan Qaboos University
Oman

Dr Philip Brierley
Rector
Umutara Polytechnic
Rwanda

Professor Brian Swanick
Former Executive Pro Vice-Chancellor
De Montfort University
Leicester
UK

Dr. Serge Herzog
Director, Institutional Analysis
University of Nevada
Reno
USA

Dr. Hassan Diab
Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering
Vice President for Regional External Programs
American University of Beirut
Lebanon

Tess Goodliffe (Executive Officer)
Oman Accreditation Council

## 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.

| | |
|---|---|
| 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. |
| BoT | Board of Trustees |
| B.Tech. | Bachelor of Technology degree |
| CAB | College Academic Board |
| Call Back Interview | An interview conducted by the Audit Panel towards the end of the Audit Visit for which it has invited specific people, usually at short notice, to respond to particular issues on which the Panel will require assistance. |
| CSS | Computer Services Section |
| 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 Center |
| ETC | Educational Technology Center |
| Executive Officer | An OAC staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide professional guidance and support. |
| External Reviewer | A Member of the OAC Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAC Board to participate as a member of the OAC's various external review panels. |
| HCT | Higher College of Technology |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider). |
| HR | Human Resources |
| Ibid | Same as the previous reference |
| 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*. |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| MoHE | Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om) |
| MoM | Ministry of Manpower |
| OAC Board | The governing body of the Oman Accreditation Council |
| OAC | Oman Accreditation Council (www.oac.gov.om) |
| OFI | Opportunity for improvement |
| OJT | On the Job Training |
| OQF | Oman Qualifications Framework. |
| OQN | Oman Quality Network |

| | |
|---|---|
| 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*. |
| QAD | Quality Assurance Department |
| Quality Assurance | The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met. |
| 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. |
| 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 Enhancement | The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing *approach*, *deployment* and *results*. |
| Random Interview | An interview conducted *in situ* by individual Panel Members during the Audit but separately from the main interview sessions. |
| 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*. |
| SIS | Student Information System |
| System | In this Report, *system* refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose. |
| The Colleges | The Colleges of Technology |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language |

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