Sultanate of Oman

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Translation of the Executive Summary of the College of Shariah Sciences Institutional Quality Audit Report

OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This Quality Audit Report (the 'Report') documents the findings of a Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA – formerly the Oman Accreditation Council) of the College of Shariah Sciences (CSS). It comments on CSS'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 CSS's activities, and constructive feedback to CSS to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with CSS undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarised in its Quality Audit Portfolio (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the due date of 1 October 2017.

The OAAA appointed an external Audit Panel (the 'Panel'), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the Quality Audit. For membership of the Panel, see Section 4. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 20 November 2017 to consider CSS's Portfolio. Following this, the Audit Panel Chairperson's representative and the Review Director undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to CSS on 19 December 2017 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel's audit visit.

Prior to the audit visit, the Panel invited submissions from the public about the quality of CSS's activities. One submission was received and considered.

The audit visit took place over 11-15 February 2018. During this time, the Panel spoke with over 80 people, including representatives of the governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. It also visited a selection of venues and reviewed a range of additional materials.

No information provided after 15 February 2018 (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.

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

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAAA Board on 7 April 2019.

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

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 origins of the CSS go back to the Institute of Shariah Law and Preaching (ISLP), which was established by Royal Decree No.24/86 to "deliver competent graduates, cognisant of the truth of religion and able to assimilate the aspects of modern civilisation and its ever-changing issues, while maintaining the national values and ideals inspired from Islam and the cultural heritage of humanity in general, and of Oman in particular" (Portfolio, p.6). In 1999, the ISLP underwent a significant transformation, as Royal Decree No.6/99 ordered its conversion into The Institute of Shariah Sciences (ISS), within the organisational structure of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, and attached to the Minister's Office. This move required reconsideration of the ISLP study plans and the review of its academic programmes.

In another major development, ISS started, in 2000, accepting female candidates, for the first time, to study for the Diploma in Islamic Sciences, before allowing them, in 2006, to register in the Bachelor degree programmes, which were until then exclusive for male candidates.

The most significant development, however, was the issue of the Royal Decree No.35/2014 which promoted ISS into the College of Shariah Sciences (henceforth, CSS) and sanctioned the issue of its byelaw "to help inculcate, in the Country, modern human values, based on religion, morals and beneficial knowledge" (Portfolio, p.6). As such, one of the College's key aims is to prepare specialists in Shariah sciences and comparative Islamic studies and equip them to conduct research in this field, to expand the human civilisational capital. The College also aims at establishing and promoting Islamic values, knowledge and ethics, highlighting the Omani participation in their development, and serving society's needs in Shariah and related sciences, as well as strengthening connections with fellow academic institutions in other countries. CSS also adopts a Mission to "be

a leader in Shariah-related higher education, participate in enhancing the Islamic and Omani identity, enrich human civilisation, and disseminate moderation" (Appendix 1), while its Vision is to "meet the requirements of quality in Shariah-related higher education in the teaching/learning process, research, and community engagement" (Appendix 1).

It is obvious that the self-evaluation CSS undertook in preparation for this audit has provided it with an opportunity to improve some aspects related to its policies, programmes and activities. This has been noted by the Panel in the College's initiation of improvement steps in a number of aspects identified in the Portfolio as Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs). The Panel, however, concluded that the self-study was largely descriptive, with no application of ADRI (Approach- Deployment- Results- Improvement) or any similar tool to analyse the performance of the College. Nor was there any clear analysis of the circumstances underpinning the improvement of various areas of the Portfolio. In many of its areas, particularly the OFIs, the Portfolio contained statements that were closer to expressions of intent by the College than reflections of its actual practices in the related areas. The Panel noted the College's failure to finalise many of the rules and policies meant to regulate the practices, activities, and various programmes of its academic and administrative units, which has slowed these units' discharge of their duties. The Panel also concluded that the College needed to establish the concept of quality and its requirements across all its units and among its entire staff, in the absence of an internal quality system and of an identified party, within the current organisational structure, to monitor the performance of CSS in this aspect. The Panel is of the view that the College would benefit enormously from strengthening this aspect and establishing it as an integral part of its proposed new organisational structure, once this structure has been approved. The College stated that the process of approving its new organisational structure is in its final stages, and the Panel confirmed this through the Audit Visit.

Regarding governance and management, while appreciating the thoughtfulness of the Chairperson and members of the CSS Board of Trustees, and their clear visionary approach to the development of the College and enhancement of its performance, the Panel would like to draw attention to a number of findings reached through this institutional audit process. Foremost among these findings is the need for CSS to expedite the finalisation of the policy documents which regulate its academic and administrative work, secure their approval by the relevant authorities and implement them, in conjunction with the approval and implementation of the new organisational structure which should be supported by job descriptions of the various academic, administrative, and support units. This needs to be addressed as soon as the new organisational structure is approved. Another equally important requirement, from the Panel's viewpoint, is the need to develop and implement specific mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the College's various boards, committees, programmes and activities, and document any related measures. This objective would be achieved if the College developed and implemented an operational plan derived from its strategic plan. In the same context, and to ensure effectiveness of the steps abovementioned, CSS needs to urgently develop and implement an integrated system for continuous quality assurance and performance improvement, including a mechanism to collect and analyse data to inform the decision-making process. The Panel also perceives a need to develop and implement a comprehensive policy management system, a risk management policy in particular, in conjunction with the end of CSS's current transition from an institute to a college, and its accomplishment of the requirements of an autonomous HEI.

As for Student Learning by Coursework Programmes, the Panel stresses CSS's need to conduct a full review of the programmes it offers currently, including benchmarking them against similar programmes. Such a review should focus on the link between the programme and course learning

outcomes (PLOs and CLOs), and link these outcomes with the generic graduate attributes and the Vision and Mission of the College, in line with the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework, and in consultation with all stakeholders. The Panel also emphasises the need for the College to review the student performance assessment methods, in line with the PLOs and CLOs, in addition to the need to improve and activate the role of academic advising, to ensure its effectiveness in supporting students in general, and those at risk in particular. The Panel equally stresses the need to analyse the student cohorts to gauge the relationship between their learning experience and the College entry requirements.

With regard to the Staff Research and Consultancy Services, the Panel stresses that scientific research and other research activities need to be among the tributaries supporting the teaching methods in the College programmes, with emphasis on staff research outputs informing and enriching the teaching and learning process. The Panel also highlights the importance for the College to develop and implement a comprehensive research policy, disseminate research ethics, ensure full compliance of students as well as staff with these, use plagiarism detection software applications, and set procedures and penalties for such violations to curb them.

Regarding Industry and Community Engagement, the Panel emphasises the need to develop and implement a policy which will help CSS further benefit from its community engagement, in order to ensure that all the activities of the College and the learning outcomes of its academic programmes are aligned to the ever-changing needs and requirements of the community.

In the area of academic support services, the Panel wishes, in the first place, to commend CSS for the big variety in the library sources, covering the various juristic schools of thought and reflecting the open-mindedness and tolerance, which mark the policy of the CSS and its academic orientations. This has also been noted by the Panel in the contents of the programmes and courses offered by the College. At the same time, the Panel sees a need for the College to review and improve its teaching and learning resources, teaching aids and e-learning resources, to ensure they meet the requirements of their users and support the teaching and learning process, in tandem with the developments in this field. The Panel also stresses the need for the College to improve the admission and registration electronic system, and to establish an integrated system for all the College units, to ensure it supports the teaching and learning process and enriches the decision-making process by providing data that inform decisions. The Panel also emphasises the need for CSS to keep back-up copies of the students' electronic records and documents in a safe location.

The Panel gathered from interviews with various stakeholders that there is a lack of clarity regarding the role of CSS in the distance-learning programme currently supervised and managed by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, hosted by the College and in which many of the CSS lecturers take part. The Panel believes that such a programme provides a good opportunity in which CSS is encouraged to play a clearer and more active role by taking part in the design and delivery of its curriculum, as well as assuming a bigger role in its management. The Panel also urges CSS to develop and implement a comprehensive mechanism to ensure the quality of this programme, including its admission criteria, methods of delivery, contents, assessment methods, alignment of its learning outcomes with the College Mission and goals, in addition to defining the responsibilities of all the parties involved in its provision.

Regarding Students and Student Support Services, the Panel lauds the services and support CSS provides to its international students. On the other hand, the Panel stresses the need to provide healthcare services, particularly First Aid, on the College premises and hostels. The Panel also

recommends that CSS adhere to parity between its male and female students in the monthly allocation it disburses to them as well as the catering services in the hostels.

Finally, with respect to the Staff and Staff Support Services, the Panel commends the level of Omanisation achieved by CSS in its administrative positions. At the same time, it recommends that the College develop a comprehensive database for its staff, which can inform the development and implementation of plans to enhance their performance.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Shariah Sciences for the big variety in its library sources, covering the various juristic schools and reflecting the open-mindedness and tolerance which mark the policy of the College and its academic orientations.
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends College of Shariah Sciences for the range of services and support it provides to international students, and encourages the College to maintain these services and follow-up with them regularly.
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends College of Shariah Sciences for the levels of Omanisation it has reached in its administrative and academic positions.

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the steps implemented by the College of Shariah Sciences to improve the teaching and learning resources, aids and infrastructure for these facilities, and urges the College to finalise these steps as soon as possible, and to develop a mechanism for assessing their effectiveness and adequacy to meet the users' needs.
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Shariah Sciences about the need to establish a career guidance centre, as part of the proposed organisational structure, and urges the College to set this centre at the earliest possible.

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences review and revise its Mission and Vision statements, according to a defined timeframe, and in consultation with all key internal and external stakeholders, to ensure that

these statements better reflect the strategic orientation of the College and are effective in guiding it towards the achievement of its goals.

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that College of Shariah Sciences to develop and implement a comprehensive mechanism to evaluate the performance of the Academic Board in order to ensure its effectiveness.

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences expedite the preparation and issue of its internal academic and administrative regulations, in conjunction with its efforts to get its executive bylaw approved, to be able to operate effectively.

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of the committees formed by the Academic Board and ensure there are work plans and key performance indicators for each of these committees.

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive system to assure quality in the College and improve its performance continuously.

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences finalise its proposed strategic plan and secure its final approval as soon as possible, so that it will be used to steer the College operations in the coming period.

7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated operational plan, in which priorities are set, with timeframes for their implementation, and roles and responsibilities of the departments and units are identified. The College also needs to develop a mechanism to monitor the implementation of this plan, with key performance indicators to measure progress in its implementation.

8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive policy to identify the various types of risks, implement appropriate mechanisms to mitigate these risks, and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy.

9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive system for the development and management of policies, with mechanisms to ensure their documentation and accessibility to staff and students, and review these policies regularly for effectiveness.

10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive policy to review its entities, including the development and implementation of a periodic review schedule and the implementation of a comprehensive system for data collection, management and analysis which includes feedback from stakeholders to support the review process and inform decision-making, so as to ensure the quality of the College activities and services.

11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences to develop and implement comprehensive policy and procedures to manage student grievances and appeals, and ensure that this policy and procedures are clearly communicated to all stakeholders, particularly the students.

12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement comprehensive a health and safety system to ensure the adequacy and effectiveness of the measures taken in this area, on the College premises as well as in the hostels.

13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences undertake a full review of the descriptions of its programmes and qualifications, including benchmarking them against comparable regional and international programmes and qualifications.
14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences undertake a review its graduate attributes, in consultation with all the key stakeholders.
15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive policy to review and improve its curricula and align them with the Oman National Qualifications Framework, taking into consideration the good practices in this area, benchmarking against curricula of comparable institutions, and engaging all key stakeholders in this review process.
16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a clear policy for the entry standards which takes into consideration the link between these standards and the student progress rates through the analysis of student cohorts, to ensure the admission of qualified students to its programmes.
17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive system to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching whose results inform the identification of professional development needs for the academic staff and the design of programmes and events appropriate to these needs, and link this with the annual staff performance appraisal.
18. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences to develop a comprehensive policy, with detailed procedures that cover all aspects of the research components in the coursework programmes, including the student graduation projects.
19. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a mechanism to define practices which violate academic integrity and intellectual property, use modern technologies to detect them, and educate and train students and academic staff on the use of these technologies to uphold academic integrity.
20. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences review the study plans of the programmes it offers and consider making placement compulsory rather than optional, in line with the needs and nature of each programme, and develop a comprehensive student placement policy, including placement learning outcomes, roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors, mechanisms for oversight, evaluation and feedback from the stakeholders to inform review and improvement processes.
21. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences review the assessment methods it uses to ensure their effectiveness in measuring the students' achievement of the targeted learning outcomes and that assessment methods are mapped with these outcomes, and analyse students' performance to inform improvements of the assessment process.
22. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that College of Shariah Sciences, as a matter of urgency, undertake an analytical study to identify and address the reasons behind the rise in the failure rates and the decline in graduation rates.
23. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah develop and implement a comprehensive academic advising system, ensure a clear and common understanding of this process among the stakeholders, particularly the academic staff, develop

and implement a mechanism to provide appropriate support to the students at risk, and review this system regularly for effectiveness.

24. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences to develop a graduate database to ensure effective communication with its graduates, establish a communication mechanism with them, such as an alumni association, analyse graduate destinations, by using feedback from all stakeholders, and use this relationship to improve the College's administrative and academic performance.

25. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences to develop and implement a comprehensive research plan, in line with the College Mission and Vision, nature and goals, and ensure the required financial resources to implement this plan.

26. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop, implement and maintain an effective research ethics policy.

27. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences analyse the academic staff research needs and activities, and set and implement a comprehensive policy to develop academic staff members and improve their research skills.

28. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a mechanism to ensure the nexus between teaching and research, and ensure that teaching and learning in the College are informed, among other aspects, by research outputs.

29. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive industry and community relations plan, with mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of these relations and collect feedback from all stakeholders to inform the improvement of activities and ensure their alignment with the needs of the targeted parties.

30. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that College of Shariah Sciences, as soon as its bylaw and proposed organisational structure are approved, activate the centres and units responsible for industry and employer engagement, course review, and academic specialisations, and develop and implement a mechanism to ensure the establishment of an effective and constructive relationship with the community and relevant employers, for the College to remain abreast of the job market requirements.

31. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a policy and detailed procedures to ensure effective and systematic engagement with the bodies representing the professional sector for informed decision-making regarding the alignment of all the College activities, academic programmes and student learning outcomes with the requirements of this sector, with a mechanism to benchmark all academic programmes.

32. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences ensure the activation of the memoranda of understanding it had signed with various international education institutions to serve the purposes for which these memoranda have been signed.

33. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences adopt an integrated planning method for academic support services which allows the College to identify and provide the academic needs to ensure an appropriate learning environment, with a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of these services.

34. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a mechanism to maintain the security and integrity of the

students' electronic data, define the privileges of the parties which have access to this database, keep records in a safe place, with copies thereof in a different place and readily retrievable whenever the need arises.

35. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop its current admission and records electronic system, as part of a comprehensive information system which covers all other systems (such as academic advising, IT, and human resources) to ensure support to the teaching and learning process.

36. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a mechanism to improve its library services, including benchmarking these services and activating the e-library.

37. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a mechanism to ensure the quality of the distance learning programme it hosts, with focus on its entry standards, delivery methods, content selection, assessment methods, alignment of its learning outcomes with the goals and Mission of the College, as well as the roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved in its delivery.

38. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences conduct a full evaluation of the student learning support services and activities and improve them to ensure the provision of an attractive and supportive learning environment is created, in line with the nature of study in the College, and set a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of the services in this area.

39. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive plan to regulate and manage all the student services, including robust mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of these services on a regular basis to inform improvement plans.

40. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop a manual or protocols to deal with student databases and evaluate their effectiveness based on feedback from stakeholders.

41. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences ensure parity between male and female students in their monthly allowance.

42. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that College of Shariah Sciences, as a matter of urgency, take appropriate measures to provide healthcare services to the College community, on campus or on other premises associated with it, particularly the hostel facilities, and evaluate the quality of these services regularly.

43. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences pay more attention to social and recreational events and activities to the students at par with other events and activities, and provide recreational facilities associated with these activities, and set a policy to prepare and implement these programmes and activities and evaluate their effectiveness.

44. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences expedite the establishment of a human resources department so that it undertakes all the procedures related to the planning and management of human resources, including defining the roles and responsibilities for the staff members at all levels, outlining their job descriptions and reporting lines, and planning staff support services for them, in line with the College Mission and Strategic Plan.

45. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop a comprehensive staff database to inform the planning and implementation of professional development programmes for its staff members.

46. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences review the academic staff recruitment process and develop and implement appropriate mechanisms to ensure the recruitment of the most suitable candidates, as part of an overarching system the College is expected to develop and implement to ensure the provision of qualified human resources, in line with the requirements of the coming phase.
47. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive professional development policy for its staff members, linked to the results of their performance appraisal, and set key performance indicators, in line with the College Mission, Vision and goals.
48. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences expedite the process of preparing the final version of the academic promotion bylaws, secure the required approvals for it, and start its implementation as soon as the College bylaws are issued.
49. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Shariah Sciences develop and implement a comprehensive and integrated plan for the planning and management of general support services and facilities, with regular studies to measure stakeholder satisfaction to inform development and improvement efforts.