



Oman Academic  
Accreditation Authority

Appeals Manual

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**Version 4**

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Sultanate of Oman [www.oaaa.gov.om](http://www.oaaa.gov.om)

## FOREWORD

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) implements a range of External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities that aim to ensure the quality of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the services they provide and the programmes they deliver, are of an acceptable standard.<sup>1</sup> The OAAA's EQA activities include:

- Institutional Quality Audit (IQA)
- Institutional Standards Assessment (ISA)
- Programme Standards Assessment (PSA)
- General Foundation Programme Quality Audit (GFPQA)
- General Foundation Programme Standards Assessment (GFPSA)
- Reassessment Activities, such as Institutional Standards Reassessment (ISR)
- Reaccreditation Activities
- Appeal Process

All OAAA EQAs are subject to appeal in line with national laws and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice.<sup>2</sup> An HEI considering lodging an appeal should ensure the appeal is in accordance with the guidelines published in this *OAAA Appeals Manual*.

The OAAA aims to provide a fair and robust avenue for appeals against Final Reports and Accreditation Outcomes arising from its formal EQA activities. On behalf of the Board of the OAAA, I wish all HEIs a positive and constructive experience with their involvement in any OAAA EQA activity.

**Dr Abdullah Al Sarmi**  
Board Chairperson  
OAAA

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<sup>1</sup> For acronyms and terms, please refer to Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.inqaah.org/guidelines-good-practice>

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## **PART A: THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

## 1 THE OMAN ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION AUTHORITY

### 1.1 *Royal Decree*

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree 54/2010 on 3 May 2010 and replaced the OAC. The OAAA is an entity with legal status and financial and administrative independence which reports to the Education Council. The OAAA was established to continue the efforts initiated by the OAC in the dissemination of a quality culture and accreditation of institutions and programmes in Oman as well as the development and maintenance of the Oman Qualifications Framework.

### 1.2 *OAAA Vision, Mission and Values*

The OAAA's Vision, Mission and Values are consistent with Royal Decree 54/2010 and the Mission and Vision of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

#### **Vision**

The OAAA aspires to provide efficient, effective and internationally recognised services for accreditation in order to promote quality in higher education in Oman and meet the needs of the public and other stakeholders.

#### **Mission**

The OAAA guides and supports the Omani higher education sector to meet international standards; maintains the national qualifications framework; and, through a transparent and rigorous system of institutional and programme accreditation, provides reliable information to the public and other stakeholders on the quality of higher education in Oman.

#### **Values**

***Integrity*** - We believe in fairness, honesty and respect and we adhere to the highest standards of integrity in dealing with all internal and external stakeholders.

***Professionalism*** - We strive to apply our skills, knowledge and best judgement in order to do our jobs well.

***Transparency*** - We ensure all stakeholders have relevant accessibility to our processes and decisions while respecting confidentiality.

***Reflectiveness*** - We believe in continuous quality improvement in all processes. We reflect on what we do and aim to improve accordingly.

***Commitment to international best practice*** - We strive to ensure that all our work processes comply with international good practices.

***Accountability*** - We believe that we are accountable to all our stakeholders for ensuring that our mandate is achieved.

***Collaboration*** - We value input from all relevant stakeholders to ensure that our work is responsive to their needs.

***Diversity*** - We respect diversity of professional opinion, and encourage innovation and creativity.

### 1.3 OAAA Structure and Organisation

The OAAA is comprised of three elements:

- An OAAA Board which has governance responsibilities for the OAAA and is appointed by the Education Council.
- The Executive Office which is made up of technical and administrative staff who conduct the OAAA's day-to-day activities.
- A Register of External Reviewers which lists eminent people from Oman and other countries who have been approved by the OAAA Board to participate in EQA activities.

Further information about the OAAA structure and organisation is available on its website.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.4 INQAAHE Membership

The OAAA is a member of INQAAHE and seeks to abide by its policies and guidelines wherever possible.<sup>4</sup> INQAAHE has published *Guidelines of Good Practice* (2016) for EQA agencies. These guidelines include the following statements:

#### *The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints*

- *The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.*
- *The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.*
- *Appeals are conducted by a panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.*<sup>5</sup>

The OAAA's policies and methods for appeal are set out in this *Appeals Manual* and are designed to be consistent with the above INQAAHE guidelines and national laws.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The initial version of the national quality management system was known as 'Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance' (ROSQA). This system contained a number of key elements: namely, the Oman Qualifications Framework; the Oman Classification of Institutions; Institutional and Programme Standards; and processes for Institutional and Programme Accreditation. Royal Decree 54/2010 established the OAAA in order to further develop the national system for assuring the quality of Oman's higher education sector. The Decree stated that the OAAA is responsible for regulating the quality of higher education in Oman to ensure the maintenance of a level that meets international standards and to encourage HEIs to improve their internal quality. This is achieved through the implementation of the OAAA's EQA activities which include IQA, ISA, PSA, GFPQA, GFPSA, Reassessment Activities and Reaccreditation Activities. Background information on the OAAA's establishment and responsibilities is available online.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1 Institutional Accreditation

In response to its mandate, the OAAA approaches institutional accreditation as an initial two-stage process. Stage 1: IQA is followed by Stage 2: ISA. Normally, four years after an HEI in Oman has

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#StaffNew>

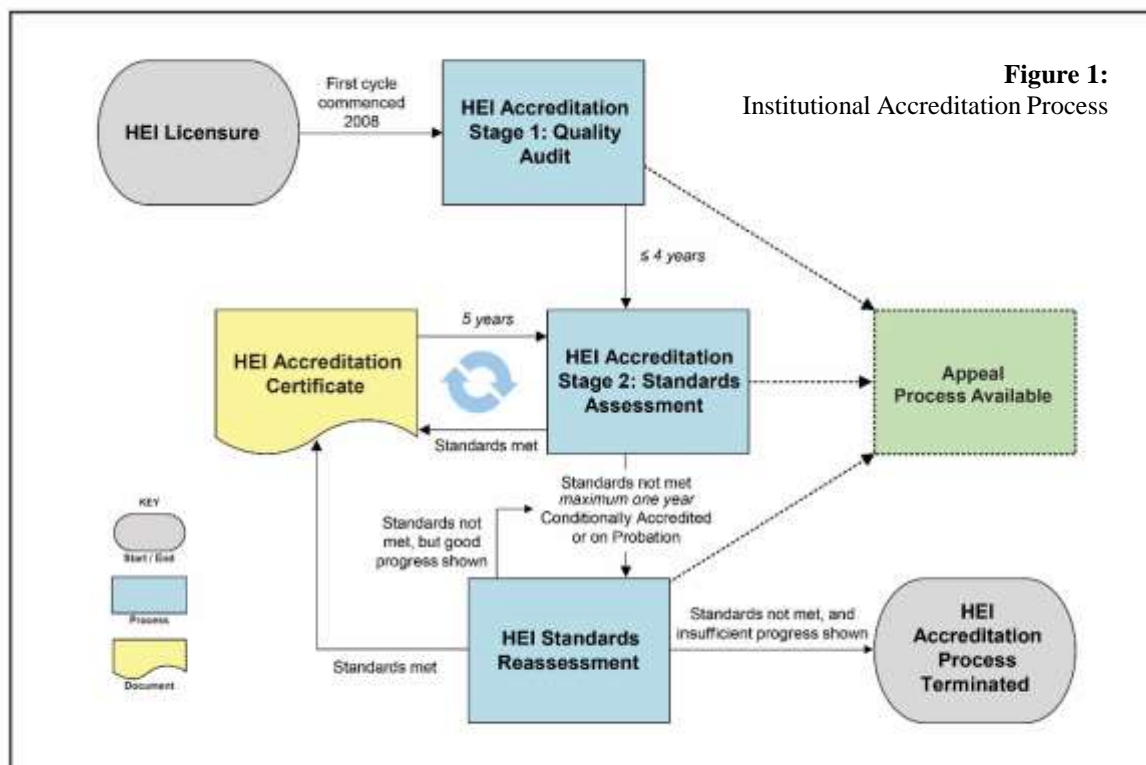
<sup>4</sup> [www.inqaah.org](http://www.inqaah.org)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.inqaah.org/guidelines-good-practice>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Establishment>



undergone IQA, it undergoes Standards Assessment which then triggers a five-year institutional accreditation cycle. IQA provides a formative stage for HEIs to critically assess their practices and processes, and identify opportunities for improvement. HEIs then undergo a summative ISA which results in an HEI being assessed as either having met or not met the standards. All applicable standards must be met in order to achieve institutional accreditation. The cycle continues with Reaccreditation through ISA taking place every five years. Figure 1 illustrates the approach to institutional accreditation in Oman.



### 2.1.1 Institutional Quality Audit

The emphasis of IQA is on evaluating the effectiveness of an HEI's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes against the institution's stated goals and objectives. A deliberate decision was made to introduce a two-stage institutional accreditation approach in order to encourage HEIs to develop their internal quality management systems through IQA while giving the public reassurance that the HEIs were being monitored. IQA results in an OAAA Final IQA Report. The Final IQA Reports for all HEIs that have undergone IQA are publically available on the OAAA website (with some pre-determined exceptions).<sup>7</sup> The *Institutional Quality Audit Manual* sets out the protocols and processes for external IQAs of HEIs.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1.2 Institutional Standards Assessment

The second stage of institutional accreditation involves the HEI undergoing ISA. The result of the ISA process is summative as the emphasis is on evaluating whether an HEI has met or has not met the applicable institutional standards set by the OAAA. The nine institutional standards are based on the nine areas covered in the IQA scope. Each ISA standard has a number of criteria. All relevant criteria must be addressed by HEIs undergoing ISA. An HEI's responses to the formal conclusions in the Final IQA Report are considered under related criteria as part of the ISA process. EQA Panels are required to rate criteria and these criteria ratings are then used to determine the ratings of standards and the Accreditation Outcome. HEIs which meet all applicable standards are accredited.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst\\_ReviewDwnld](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_ReviewDwnld)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst\\_Quality](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Quality)

An HEI which does not meet one or two applicable standards is conditionally accredited for up to one year prior to undergoing the ISR; an HEI which does not meet three or more applicable standards is placed on probation for up to one year prior to undergoing the ISR. Accredited HEIs undergo Institutional Standards Reaccreditation on a five-year cyclical basis in order to maintain their accreditation status. The *Institutional Standards Assessment Manual* includes the institutional standards and sets out the processes for assessing HEIs against these standards.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.3 Institutional Standards Reassessment

If an HEI demonstrates unsatisfactory performance against one or two of the applicable standards, the EQA Panel recommends to the OAAA Board that the HEI is conditionally accredited. If an HEI demonstrates unsatisfactory performance against three or more of the applicable standards, it is recommended to the OAAA Board that the HEI is placed on probation. The length of the conditional accreditation or probation period depends on the nature and number of standards that were *Not Met* and the amount of time that the EQA Panel considers is required for the HEI to meet those standards. This period is generally counted from the day following the date of the receipt of the Final ISA Report by the HEI and does not exceed one year. The period is approved by the OAAA Board. The Accreditation Outcome of *Conditionally Accredited* or *On Probation* is published on the OAAA website together with the HEI's ratings for all standards and criteria.

After the period of conditional accreditation or probation, an HEI submits an ISR Application (ISRA). During the ISR, only the following criteria are re-assessed:

- All criteria which were *Not Met* at the time of the initial ISA, or, where applicable, the preceding ISR.
- All *Partially Met* criteria associated with Standards which were not met in the initial ISA or, where applicable, the preceding ISR. *Partially Met* criteria associated with Standards which have been met are not reassessed.

The possible results of ISR (first attempt) are as follows:

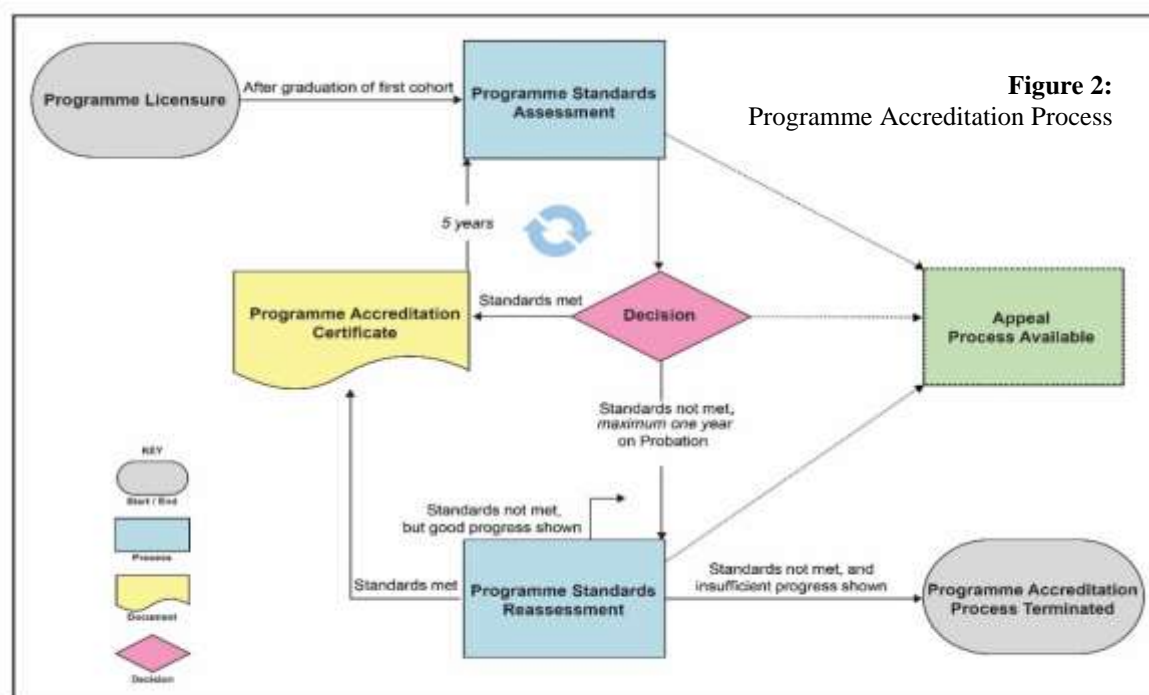
- If the ratings of the reassessed criteria now fulfil the requirements for the standard(s) to be *Met* (up to two criteria may still be *Partially Met*), the EQA Panel recommends to the OAAA Board that the HEI is accredited.
- If the ratings of the reassessed criteria still do not fulfil the requirements for the standards to be *Met*, but the EQA Panel considers good progress has been made and the standard(s) are likely to be deemed *Satisfactory* in the future, the EQA Panel recommends to the OAAA Board that the HEI undergoes a further ISR (second attempt) at a time to be approved by the OAAA Board. Probation/Conditional Accreditation can only be extended for a maximum period of one year from the end of the ISR (first attempt) unless deferral is granted.
- If, as the result of a second attempt at ISR, the ratings of the reassessed criteria still do not fulfil the requirements for the standard(s) to be *Met*, and the EQA Panel determines that the HEI is unable to meet the requirements of the standard(s) in the near future, the EQA Panel recommends to the OAAA Board that the HEI is not accredited. The OAAA issues an outcome of *Not Accredited* and the institutional accreditation process is terminated. The OAAA advises the Education Council and the HEI's supervising Ministry (if applicable) accordingly.

## 2.2 Programme Accreditation

The OAAA is responsible for the accreditation of all higher education programmes offered in Oman. The OAAA's role is to accredit programmes against national standards that have been internationally benchmarked. The process includes programmes where the award is conferred by an affiliate university. HEIs must have been awarded Institutional Accreditation before they can

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst\\_Assessment\\_New](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Assessment_New)

apply for Programme Accreditation. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for PSA to take place concurrently with ISA.<sup>10</sup> Figure 2 illustrates the approach to programme accreditation in Oman.



### 2.2.1 Programme Standards Assessment

As with ISA, PSA is a summative process evaluating whether a programme has met the two applicable programme standards and related criteria. All applicable criteria must be addressed by HEIs undergoing PSA. Programmes which meet the two applicable standards are accredited. Programmes which do not meet any applicable standards are put on probation for up to one year before undergoing Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR).

### 2.2.2 Programme Standards Reassessment

In line with the approach taken to ISR after an HEI is conditionally accredited or placed on probation, a programme placed on probation is required to undergo PSR up to a year after the PSA has taken place. This may be followed by a second PSR up to a year following this. In each case, the EQA Panel recommends the length of time it considers the HEI needs to prepare for a PSR. This period is approved by the OAAA Board. During PSR, only the following criteria are reassessed:

- All criteria which were rated *Not Met* at the time of the initial PSA, or, where applicable, the preceding PSR.
- All *Partially Met* criteria associated with standards which were not met in the initial PSA or, where applicable, the preceding PSR. *Partially Met* criteria associated with standards which have been met are not reassessed.

The possible results of PSR (first attempt) are:

- If the ratings of the reassessed criteria now fulfil the requirements for the standards to be *Met* (up to two criteria may still be *Partially Met*), the EQA Panel recommends to the OAAA Board that the programme is accredited.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst\\_Assessment\\_New](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Assessment_New)

- If the ratings of the reassessed criteria still do not fulfil the requirements for the standards to be *Met*, but the EQA Panel considers good progress has been made and the standard(s) are likely to be deemed *Satisfactory* in the future, the EQA Panel recommends to the OAAA Board that the HEI undergoes a further PSR (second attempt) at a time to be approved by the OAAA Board. Probation can only be extended for a maximum period of one year from the end of the PSR (first attempt) unless a deferral is granted.
- If the ratings of the reassessed criteria do not fulfil the requirements for the standard(s) to be *Met*, and the EQA Panel determines that the programme is unable to meet the requirements of the standard(s) in the future, the EQA Panel recommends to the OAAA Board that the programme is not accredited. The OAAA issues an outcome of *Not Accredited* and the OAAA Programme Accreditation process is terminated. The OAAA advises the Education Council and the HEI's supervising Ministry (if applicable) accordingly.

### 2.3 General Foundation Programme Accreditation

The OAAA is responsible for the external review of the quality of General Foundation Programmes (GFPs). While GFPs do not lead to a higher education academic qualification or award, for many students in Oman, they are an integral part of the higher education experience. In line with its approach to institutional accreditation, the OAAA is in the process of developing a three-stage approach to the accreditation of GFPs in Oman: Stage 1 involves GFPQA and this is followed by Stage 2 which involves reviewing the General Foundation Programme Standards; Stage 3 is conducting GFPSA. Further information on the OAAA's approach to the first stage can be found in the OAAA's *General Foundation Programme Quality Audit Manual*.<sup>11</sup>

#### 2.3.1 General Foundation Programme Quality Audit

GFPQA fulfils two different but related purposes: firstly, it is an important means by which HEIs offering GFPs are held accountable to society for their role in preparing students for higher education. The full Final GFPQA Report is published in either English or Arabic, together with an Executive Summary in the corresponding language, allowing for an informed perspective on how well an institution is attending to its responsibilities for its GFP.

Secondly, and of equal importance, GFPQA is a means for facilitating continuous quality improvement of the HEI's GFP. It generates the impetus for a Self-Study, and then produces an independent evaluative Final GFPQA Report containing formal conclusions in the form of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations (CARs). These CARs can be used for formative purposes and as a key reference when preparing for GFPSA.

#### 2.3.2 General Foundation Programme Standards Assessment

The Oman Academic Standards for GFPs, first approved by the former Higher Education Council in June 2008, are due to be reviewed once all HEIs have completed GFPQA. The GFPSA and Reassessment processes will follow a similar approach to PSA. Further information will be provided on the OAAA website once the revised GFP standards and the GFPSA process have been finalised.

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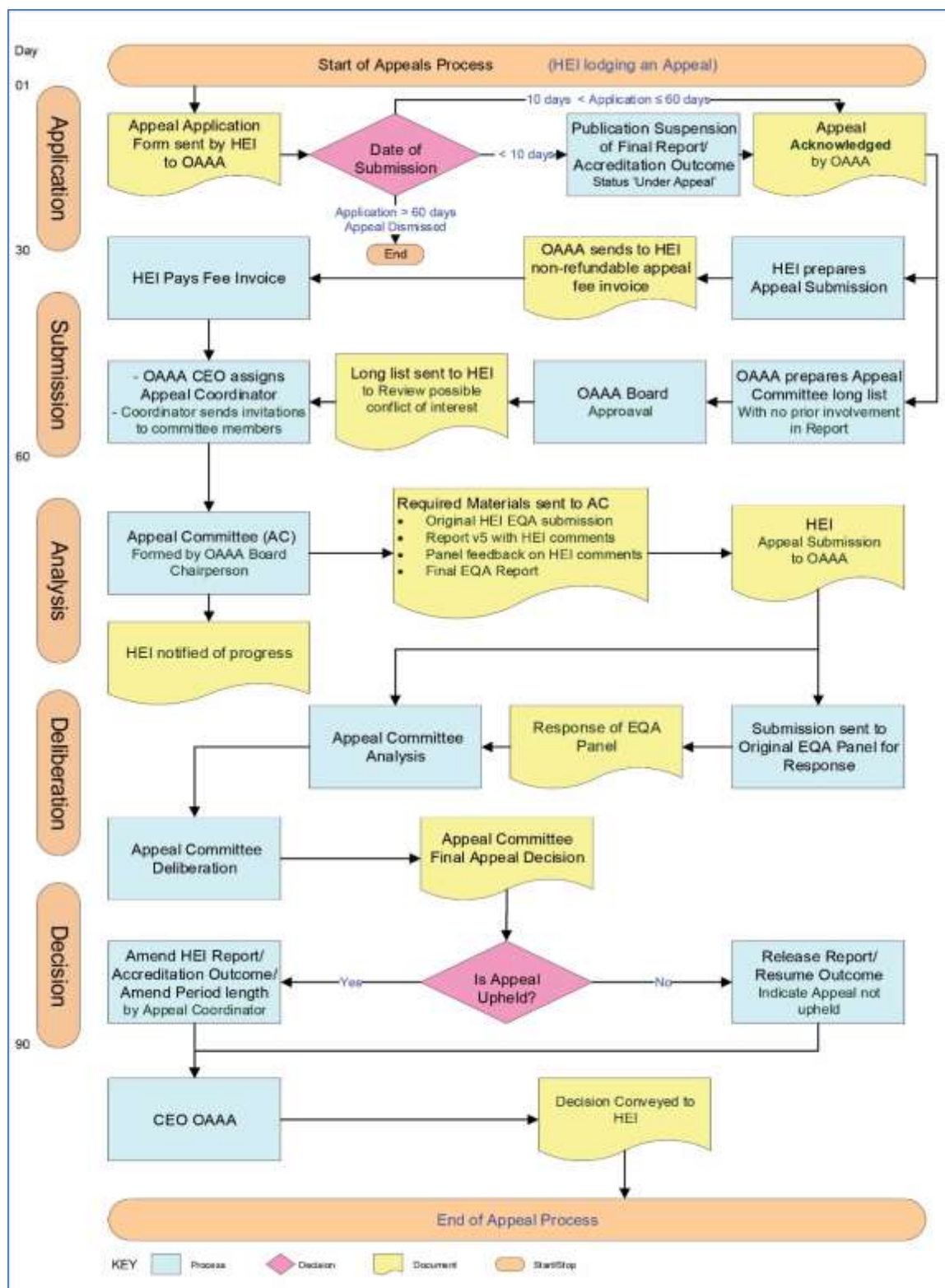
<sup>11</sup> <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Programme.aspx#GeneralFoundation>

# **PART B: THE APPEAL PROCESS**

### 3 OVERVIEW

#### 3.1 Overview of the Appeal Process

An overview of the main steps which are included in the appeal process is shown in Figure 3. As indicated in the diagram, there are two key HEI submissions: the Appeal Application and Appeal Submission. The Appeal Application (see Appendix D) indicates an HEI’s intention to submit an appeal. The Appeal Submission concisely explains the exact nature of all the claims that comprise the appeal. Further details are provided throughout this *Appeals Manual*.





### 3.2 *Stages of the Appeal Process*

The following table sets out in sequential order the main tasks associated with the appeal process.

<b>Indicative Timetable</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
	1	OAAA sends Final Report to HEI under embargo for 10 working days	OAAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
	2	Appellant (the HEI lodging an appeal) submits Appeal Application Form (Appendix D) to OAAA CEO	Appellant
	3	OAAA acknowledges receipt of Appeal Application Form and sends non-refundable appeal fee invoice (see Section 13) and an Appeal Coordinator is appointed	OAAA CEO
	4	OAAA temporarily suspends the publication of either the Final Report or the Accreditation Outcome and updates HEI status on the OAAA website as 'Under Appeal'(if the Appeal Application Form is received within the ten working days embargo period); the Review Director (RD) and Panel of the EQA activity under appeal are notified.	OAAA CEO and DCEO-TAD
	5	OAAA prepares Appeals Committee longlist from the approved External Reviewers (ER) on the ER Register; Chairperson of OAAA Board approves the longlist	OAAA CEO and Chairperson of OAAA Board
	6	Appellant prepares Appeal Submission (see Section 7.3)	Appellant
	7	OAAA sends Appeals Committee longlist to Appellant	OAAA CEO
	8	Appellant reviews whether any External Reviewers on Appeals Committee longlist may have a conflict of interest (see Section 4.5.1 and returns comments to OAAA	Appellant
		Appellant pays the appeal fee.	
	9	OAAA sends invitation to the shortlisted Appeals Committee Members from the longlist that has been vetted by the HEI for conflict of interest and approved by the Chairperson of OAAA Board	Appeals Committee Coordinator
		Appeals Committee Members complete and submit Declaration Form (Appendix C)	
	10	OAAA forms the Appeals Committee <sup>12</sup>	Chairperson of OAAA Board
		OAAA sends to the appellant the names of the appointed members of the Appeal Committee	
<b>Within 60 calendar days of receipt of Final Report</b>	11	<b>Appeal Submission sent to OAAA</b>	<b>Appellant</b>
		OAAA acknowledges receipt of submission	Appeals Committee Coordinator
	12	Key dates agreed with Appeals Committee and Appellant notified of first Appeals Committee meeting date	Appeals Committee or Appeals Committee Coordinator

<sup>12</sup> An Appeals Committee may be formed before or after the HEI submits an Appeals Submission

	13	OAAA sends following documentation to Appeals Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appellant Appeal Submission</li> <li>• Original HEI EQA submission</li> <li>• EQA Report v5</li> <li>• HEI's comments on v5</li> <li>• Panel response to HEI comments on Report v5 and actions taken as a result</li> <li>• Final EQA Report (indicating any changes made to EQA Report v6 by the OAAA Board)</li> <li>• EQA Panel response to the Appellant's submission</li> <li>• EQA RD's response to the Appellant's submission</li> </ul>	Appeals Committee Coordinator
	14	Appeal Submission is sent to original EQA Panel and/or OAAA Board for response	Appeals Committee Coordinator and RD
	15	The RD collates the response of the EQA Panel (and/or OAAA Board) to the Appeal Submission and includes his or her own comments, and submits this to the Appeals Committee Coordinator (see Section 8)	RD (and/or CEO)
	16	Appeals Committee Members prepare preliminary analysis and send to Appeals Committee Coordinator	Appeals Committee
	17	Preliminary analysis from Appeals Committee is compiled by Coordinator and circulated, together with response from EQA Panel (and/or OAAA Board) to Appeals Committee prior to meeting	Appeals Committee Coordinator
	18	Agenda for Appeals Committee Meeting prepared	Appeals Committee or Appeals Committee Coordinator
	<b>19</b>	<b>Appeals Committee Meeting (see Section 9)</b>	<b>Appeals Committee</b>
	20	Further Appeals Committee meetings held (as necessary)	Appeals Committee
	21	Appeals Committee minutes prepared by Coordinator, circulated to Appeals Committee Members for feedback and approved by Appeals Committee Chairperson	Appeals Committee Coordinator and Appeals Committee
	22	Appeals Committee decision issued and covering letter to OAAA CEO and HEI prepared	Appeals Committee Chair
		Appeals Committee decision and covering letters sent to OAAA CEO	Appeals Committee Coordinator
<b>Within 30 calendar days of Appeal Submission</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>Appeals Committee decision sent to Appellant and to OAAA Board for information</b>	<b>OAAA CEO</b>
	24	Where applicable, original or amended results (for example, Accreditation Outcome or ratings) posted on OAAA website <sup>13</sup>	OAAA
	25	Post-appeal EQA Report amended according to Appeals Committee decision and submitted to OAAA Board for approval	Appeals Committee Coordinator

<sup>13</sup> The Accreditation Outcome may have been published earlier (if the Appellant did not submit an Appeal Application within ten working days from the date of receiving the Final Report)



26	OAAA Board approves post-appeal EQA Report	OAAA Board
27	Post-appeal EQA Report released. Quality Audit Reports sent to the HEI and published on the OAAA website; Standards Assessment Report sent to the HEI and relevant government bodies	OAAA
28	Feedback report prepared	Appeals Committee Coordinator

### 3.3 *Language of the Appeal Process*

Normally, the appeal is addressed in the language in which the submission for the original EQA process was conducted by the OAAA. The language of the appeal may, however, be negotiated with the OAAA CEO prior to the Appeal Application Form being submitted to the OAAA.

## 4 THE APPEALS COMMITTEE

### 4.1 *Purpose*

- The purpose of forming the Appeals Committee is to provide external scrutiny of EQA processes to ensure that they were conducted as per established practice stipulated in the relevant EQA manual (see Appendix G for Guidance Note).
- It should be noted that the appeal represents tertiary analysis (of an institution or programme, including GFP). Primary analysis is undertaken by an HEI through self-study or self-assessment. Secondary analysis, designed to check the validity of the primary analysis, is carried out through OAAA's EQA processes. Tertiary analysis is undertaken by the Appeal Committee focusing on whether the secondary analysis was conducted as per established practice (for example, where the text does not support the outcome, or the appropriate evidence was overlooked or triangulation was not carried out). There is no remit given to the Appeals Committee to conduct a new secondary analysis. With this in mind, the Appeals Committee does not visit the Appellant's premises, nor does it interview staff or students.
- Appeals Committees are authorised to make decisions and direct the OAAA to make any changes to Final Reports consistent with the scope of their authority as an Appeals Committee.

### 4.2 *Membership*

- The Appeals Committee is appointed by the Chairperson of the OAAA Board, in consultation with the CEO of OAAA and comprises a Chairperson and up to four other Members for each appeal. Each Appeals Committee normally includes at least one locally-based External Reviewer from the OAAA Register of External Reviewers. In the event of an appeal against a 'Not Accredited' Accreditation Outcome, the maximum membership of five members would normally be utilised to reflect the gravity of the case.
- The composition of a longlist of potential Appeals Committee members is carefully considered for each specific appeal in order to ensure that appropriate expertise is assigned to each case. Longlisted members are drawn from the OAAA Register of External Reviewers, excluding those who have had involvement in the original EQA process.
- The HEI is requested to identify any potential conflict of interest with the proposed nominees.
- OAAA sends invitation to the shortlisted Appeals Committee Members from the longlist that has been vetted by the HEI for conflict of interest and approved by the Chairperson of OAAA Board.

- Shortlisted Committee members are required, furthermore, to sign a declaration form (see Appendix C) that includes a statement regarding conflict of interest, in line with OAAA's Values of 'Integrity' and 'Transparency'.

### **4.3 Appeals Committee Coordinator**

The Appeals Committee Coordinator is normally a member of OAAA technical staff (other than the RD of the EQA under appeal) nominated by the OAAA Executive Office to support the smooth running of the appeal process. The Coordinator is not a member of the Appeals Committee but has access to all Appeal Submission documents, provides support to the Appeals Committee and ensures that the appeal is carried out in line with the process set out in this manual.

### **4.4 Responsibilities**

#### **4.4.1 Responsibilities of the Appeals Committee**

Members of the Appeals Committee have the following responsibilities:

- To deliberate upon the appeal submitted to the Appeals Committee and to make a decision.
- To consider the Appeal Submission and supporting documentation; to prepare a preliminary analysis and actively contribute to the Appeals Committee meetings, and to provide feedback on minutes of the Appeals Committee meetings.
- To clearly establish the grounds for the Appeals Committee decisions (see Section 9).
- To limit the scope of their deliberations to appeals against EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports). The Appeals Committee has no authority to deal with general complaints.

#### **4.4.2 Responsibilities of the Appeals Committee Chairperson**

In addition to sharing the responsibilities set out in Section 4.4.1 above, the Appeals Committee Chairperson has the following responsibilities:

- To convene all deliberations of the Appeals Committee.
- To facilitate consensus-based decision-making processes of the Appeals Committee and to ensure that the appeal process is carried out in accordance with this *Appeals Manual* and OAAA values.
- To communicate the decision of the Appeals Committee to the Appellant (through the OAAA CEO).

#### **4.4.3 Responsibilities of the Appeals Committee Coordinator**

- To draft with OAAA CEO the Appeal process timeline and milestones.
- To coordinate with the Appeals Committee Chairperson regarding the Appeal process and act as the focal point for all communication between Appeals Committee Members.
- To request the Finance Department at OAAA to raise an invoice for the Appeal fee and send to the OAAA CEO for approval.
- To send invitations to shortlisted Appeals Committee Members.
- To communicate the names of the appointed Appeals Committee Members to the Appellant.
- To circulate the Appeal Submission and related documentation to the Appeals Committee.
- To send the Appeal Submission to the RD of the EQA (through the CEO) in line with the process for handling responses set out in Section 8 of this *Appeals Manual*.
- To collate the preliminary analysis submitted by each Appeals Committee Member and circulate to the Appeals Committee prior to the first Appeals Committee meeting.
- To prepare agendas, letters and other working documents.

- To attend all the Appeals Committee meetings and to provide guidance to the Appeals Committee on the appeal process as set out in this *Appeals Manual* and in alignment with OAAA values.
- To record the Appeals Committee decisions in minutes of meetings, circulate those minutes to the Appeals Committee for feedback, and submit the minutes for final approval by the Appeals Committee Chairperson.
- To commission the drafting of the two decision letters addressed to the HEI and the OAAA CEO to be signed by the Appeals Committee Chairperson.
- To amend the post-appeal EQA Report to include the dates and outcome of the Appeals process, together with the names of Committee Members and a summary of the subject of the Appeal (for example, criteria ratings in standards assessment). Any amendments are indicated as footnote(s) in the post-appeal Report. These footnotes should be attributed to the Appeals Committee.

#### 4.4.4 Responsibilities of the OAAA Board

- To respond to any HEI appeal claim against any amendment initiated by the OAAA Board to an EQA Report after the HEI's comments have been made on Draft Report Version 5 (v5).
- To approve and release, where an appeal is upheld, an amended Accreditation Outcome (including ratings) and post-appeal EQA Report in line with the decision of the Appeals Committee.
- To approve and release, where an appeal is not upheld, the original Accreditation Outcome (including ratings) and post-appeal EQA Report in line with the decision of the Appeals Committee.
- To receive and consider the Annual Appeals Report prepared by the Technical Affairs Division of OAAA.
- To approve the *Appeals Manual*.

#### 4.4.5 Responsibilities of the OAAA Board Chairperson

In addition to sharing the responsibilities set out in Section 4.4.4 above, the OAAA Board Chairperson has the following responsibilities:

- To approve the longlist of the Appeals Committee prepared by the OAAA CEO.
- To appoint the Members of the Appeals Committee, including the Chairperson, based on the longlist, in consultation with the CEO.

#### 4.4.6 Responsibilities of the OAAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

In addition to sharing the responsibilities of the Appeals Committee Coordinator (see Section 4.4.3), the OAAA CEO has the following responsibilities:

- To receive the Appeal Application Form and Appeal Submission from the Appellant.
- To appoint the Appeals Committee Coordinator.
- To approve the raising of an invoice for the Appeal fee initiated by the Appeals Committee Coordinator.
- To prepare the longlist for each Appeals Committee.
- To ensure the provision of effective and efficient administrative support to the Appeals Committee.
- To send the Appeals Committee longlist to the Appellant.
- To liaise, as necessary, with the Appellant on administrative matters pertaining to the appeal.
- To communicate the decision of the Appeals Committee to the Appellant.
- To receive reports on the performance of the Appeals Committee Members from the Appeals Committee Chairperson.
- To review and update the *Appeals Manual* as necessary and to submit it to the OAAA Board for approval.

#### 4.4.7 Communication

The Appeal Application Form (Appendix D) and completed Appeal Submission Template (Appendix E) should be sent to the CEO of the OAAA and signed by the Appellant's most senior representative. Other communication in relation to the appeal should be made through the OAAA Appeals Committee Coordinator and the Appellant's nominated Contact Person (see Appendix D). Under no circumstances should the Appeals Committee Chairperson or Appeals Committee Members be contacted directly by the Appellant. In cases where the Appellant attempts to communicate directly with any Member of the Appeals Committee, the appeal is automatically rejected (see Section 4.6).

### 4.5 *Conflicts of Interest*

All Members of the Appeals Committee must declare any potential conflict of interest prior to their participation. An established conflict of interest results in the withdrawal of an External Reviewer from an appeal process (see Section 4.5.3).

#### 4.5.1 Types of Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest may be personal or professional. A personal conflict of interest may arise if one or more of the following conditions apply to the Appeals committee member:

- An immediate family member or a very close friend is on the governing body or staff of the Appellant or is a student of the Appellant
- Animosity exists with a person on the governing body or staff of the Appellant
- A financial interest exists in the Appellant, or financial interest in a going concern in association with any member of the governance and/or management or staff of the Appellant
- Bias is borne towards or against the Appellant due to previous circumstances (including being a graduate or having been a staff member of the Appellant)

A professional conflict of interest may arise if the Appeals committee member:

- Is currently an applicant or candidate for a position with the Appellant
- Is currently engaged in, or has been engaged, within the past five years, with the delivery or receipt of professional services to/from the Appellant which may affect the Standards Assessment or Quality Audit appeal process (such as being an external examiner; participating in internal review processes, providing consulting services)
- Has been a member of an EQA Panel involved in the assessment of the Appellant within the past five years
- Belongs to, or has an interest in, an organisation currently involved in an explicit competitive process against the Appellant (as distinct from general competition within the sector).
- Holds a managerial position in an organisation currently involved in a major form of cooperation with the HEI concerned in the EQA (such as benchmarking, external examination and research collaboration).

#### 4.5.2 Consultation with Appellant

The OAAA CEO draws up a longlist of names for each Appeals Committee. This list is submitted in strict confidence to the Appellant's most senior representative who is invited to comment on whether any person included on the longlist has a conflict of interest (the only grounds for objection). The OAAA CEO is not obliged to agree with any objection from the Appellant (other than those listed in 4.5.1 above), but must consider all objections carefully. Once the Appeals Committee has been confirmed, the names of the Appeals Committee Members are sent to the Appellant.

### 4.5.3 Appeals Committee Member Declarations

External Reviewers must complete, sign and return an Appeals Committee Member Declaration Form (Appendix C) to the OAAA before they may be confirmed as a Member of a particular Appeals Committee. If they have concerns about a possible conflict of interest, they should contact the OAAA CEO to discuss the matter further. An established conflict of interest results in the removal of a potential committee member from the longlist.

## 4.6 *Undue Influence*

It is not permissible for the Appellant to exert undue influence on the Appeals Committee or the OAAA, including the OAAA Board. Undue influence by the Appellant (or stakeholders of the Appellant) may take a number of forms, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Communication about the appeal with the Chairperson or individual Members of the Appeals Committee or the OAAA Board during the course of the appeal (except as a formal part of the appeal process)
- Explicit or implied threats against the Appeals Committee or OAAA Board Members
- Explicit or implied promises of benefits to the Appeals Committee or OAAA Board Members
- Gifts

In the event of undue influence occurring, the appeal process is automatically cancelled and the EQA results remain unchanged and this is reflected in the post-appeal Final Report.

## 5 **GROUNDS FOR APPEAL**

An HEI is entitled, subject to the terms and conditions set out in this *Appeals Manual*, to appeal against EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) approved by the OAAA Board relating to OAAA's EQA activities.

Appeals may only relate to matters raised by an Appellant in its comments on Draft Report Version 5 (v5), and/or any subsequent changes made by OAAA after the HEI submits its comments on Draft v5 that have not been requested by the Appellant.

### 5.1 *Admissible Grounds for Appeal*

#### 5.1.1 Formal Conclusions of Quality Audit Reports

All OAAA's Quality Audit activities result in a Final Report. These reports contain formal conclusions in the form of CARs.

The grounds for appealing against formal conclusions (CARs) of a Quality Audit Report are:

- Significant factual inaccuracies that the HEI has already tried to correct by providing the appropriate evidence to the EQA Panel.
- Emphases or perspectives taken by the EQA Panel that are unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and lead to unfair results (including formal conclusions (CARs))
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and results in unfair results (including formal conclusions (CARs))
- The EQA process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from the relevant EQA manual in a manner that had not been agreed by both parties.
- The formal results (including formal conclusions (CARs)) are manifestly at odds with the respective commentary in the Report.

### 5.1.2 Accreditation Outcomes

All Standards Assessments result in a formal Accreditation Outcome approved by the OAAA Board in relation to the accredited status of an institution or a programme. The possible Accreditation Outcomes include:

- ‘Accredit with Distinction/Merit in [*name of Standard(s)*]’ an institution or a programme (including GFP)
- ‘Accredit’ an institution or a programme (including GFP)
- ‘Conditionally Accredit’ an institution which does not meet one or two standards, for a specific period
- Place an institution or a programme (including GFP) ‘On Probation’, where it does not meet the required number of standards (three or more standards in ISA and one or more standard(s) in PSA), for a specific probation period
- ‘Not Accredit’ an institution or a programme (including GFP) in case of Standards Reassessment

The grounds for appealing against an Accreditation Outcome are:

- Significant factual inaccuracies that the HEI has already tried to correct by providing the appropriate evidence to the EQA Panel
- Emphases or perspectives taken by the EQA Panel that are unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and result in unfair assessment of a standard or related criteria
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and results in unfair assessment of a standard or related criteria
- The EQA process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from the relevant EQA manual in a manner that had not been agreed by both parties
- The Accreditation Outcome and/or ratings are manifestly at odds with the Final Report

### 5.2 *Non-admissible Grounds for Appeal*

A non-admissible appeal is one where the Appeal Committee considers the submission but does not uphold it. The following shall not constitute grounds for an appeal:

- Any matters not raised by the Appellant in its comments on Draft Report Version 5 (v5)
- Important information which the Appellant had failed to submit in a timely fashion during the EQA process
- Undue influence on Appeals Committee (see Section 4.6)

### 5.3 *Grounds for Rejection of Appeal*

An appeal application may be rejected before reaching the Appeal Committee in the following circumstances:

- An Appeal Submission is received by OAAA after 60 calendar days from the date the Final EQA Report was received (see Section 7.3)
- The non-receipt of appeal fee (see Section 7.3)

## 6 SUBJECT OF APPEAL

This *Appeals Manual* applies to appeals against the results of OAAA’s EQA activities as indicated in the following sections.

## **6.1 Institutional Accreditation**

### **6.1.1 Institutional Quality Audit Results**

IQA is the first of two stages of institutional accreditation. As such, there is no Accreditation Outcome resulting solely from a Quality Audit. The result of an IQA is a Final IQA Report approved by the OAAA Board and includes formal conclusions in the form of CARs. These conclusions may be subject to appeal. The Appellant does not, however, have the right to appeal against the text of the Final IQA Report.

### **6.1.2 Institutional Standards Assessment Results**

There are three results from ISA: (i) ratings of standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome based on these ratings, and (iii) a confidential Final ISA Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome (including the length of the conditional accreditation or probation period). It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final ISA Report.

### **6.1.3 Institutional Standards Reassessment Results**

There are three results from ISR (which takes place after a conditional accreditation or probation period): (i) ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome and (iii) a confidential Final ISR Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome following ISR (including the length of the conditional accreditation or probation period). It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final ISR Report.

## **6.2 Programme Accreditation**

### **6.2.1 Programme Standards Assessment Results**

There are three results from PSA: (i) ratings of standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome; and (iii) a confidential Final PSA Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome (including the length of the probation period). It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final PSA Report.

### **6.2.2 Programme Standards Reassessment Results**

There are three results from Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR): (i) ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome based on these ratings, and (iii) a confidential Final PSR Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome following PSR (including the length of the probation period). It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final PSR Report.

## **6.3 General Foundation Programme Accreditation**

### **6.3.1 General Foundation Programme Quality Audit Results**

There is no Accreditation Outcome resulting solely from a GFPQA. The result of a GFPQA is a Final GFPQA Report approved by the OAAA Board and includes formal conclusions in the form of CARs. These conclusions may be subject to appeal. The Appellant does not, however, have the right to appeal against the text of the Final GFPQA Report.

### 6.3.2 General Foundation Programme Standards Assessment Results

There are three results from GFPSA: (i) ratings of standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome based on these ratings; and (iii) a confidential Final GFPSA Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome (including the length of the probation period). It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final GFPSA Report.

### 6.3.3 General Foundation Programme Standards Reassessment Results

There are three results from General Foundation Programme Standards Reassessment (GFPSR): (i) ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome based on these ratings, and (iii) a confidential Final GFPSR Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome following GFPSR (including the length of the probation period). It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final GFPSR Report.

## 7 THE APPEAL APPLICATION

The period in which an HEI may apply for appeal is ten working days from the date that it received the Final EQA Report (as opposed to the draft Report) to ensure suspension of the results. This date is confirmed in the covering letter from the OAAA that accompanies the Final EQA Report. In line with national legal requirements, however, even after the publication of the Final EQA Report or Accreditation Outcome on the OAAA website, an HEI has the right to appeal the result of the EQA activity up to 60 calendar days from the time it received the Final EQA Report. Any application received after this will be rejected (see Section 5.3).

### 7.1 *The Appeal Application Form*

- The HEI completes the Appeal Application Form (see Appendix D) and ensures it is received by the OAAA CEO within ten working days to qualify for temporary suspension of the results (see Section 7.2).
- In the event that an appeal is made after the ten working days, the HEI must complete the Appeal Application Form (see Appendix D) and ensure it is received by the OAAA CEO prior within 60 calendar days.
- The HEI needs to indicate the date of the Appeal Submission (see Section 7.3) to enable the OAAA to make the arrangements for the appeal process.
- The only person authorised to submit an Appeal Application Form on behalf of the HEI is the Appellant's most senior representative (see Appendix B for a definition).

### 7.2 *Temporary Suspension of the Report and Accreditation Outcome*

- If the Appeal Application Form is submitted within ten working days from the date the HEI received the Final EQA Report, the OAAA suspends the publication of the Final Report or the Accreditation Outcome (as appropriate). In this circumstance, the Final Report or Accreditation Outcome remains suspended until the Appeals Committee has come to a final decision.
- Final Reports and Accreditation Outcomes are not made public by the OAAA during the suspension period and the OAAA updates the status of the HEI as 'Under Appeal' on the OAAA website.
- If the Appeal Application Form is submitted after ten working days (but within 60 calendar days) from the date the HEI received the Final EQA Report, the OAAA will keep the EQA results that have already been published in the public domain, subject to any amendments that may arise from the Appeal process.



### 7.3 *The Appeal Submission*

- The Appellant completes and submits the substantive Appeal Submission document, using the Appeals Submission Form and Template (Appendix E), within 60 calendar days from the date the Final EQA Report was received. Failure to abide by the latter stipulation leads to the rejection of the appeal.
- The Appeal Submission document should detail, as concisely as possible, the exact nature of the claims that comprise the appeal and clarify the grounds of the appeal.
- The Appellant should ensure that the submission contains *all* and *only* the argumentation and evidence in support of the appeal.
- Eight hard copies, eight searchable electronic copies in pdf format, and one electronic copy in Microsoft Word format of the Appeal Submission should be sent to the OAAA CEO.
- An Appeal submissions will only be accepted if the non-refundable Appeal fee, (see Section 13) is paid in advance.
- The only person authorised to submit an Appeal Submission Form and Template on behalf of the HEI is the Appellant's most senior representative (see Appendix B for a definition).

## 8 RESPONSE TO THE APPEAL SUBMISSION

The Appeals Committee Coordinator liaises with the RD of the original EQA Panel for a response to the claims made in the Appeal Submission. The focus of this communication is on (i) claims that were included in the HEI's earlier comments on EQA Report v5, and (ii) any additions made after v5. The RD liaises with the original EQA Panel Chairperson and Members, and coordinates preparation of the EQA Panel's response and includes his or her own comments. The collated response is submitted to the Appeals Committee to assist in the appeal deliberations.

## 9 APPEALS COMMITTEE PROCESS AND DELIBERATIONS

- The Appeal Submission and supporting documentation are circulated to the Appeals Committee Members.
- Each Appeals Committee Member considers the Appeal Submission and supporting documentation. This documentation includes the response from the EQA Panel (and the OAAA Board, where relevant) to the Appeal Submission, if available; where this is not available, it can be circulated to the Appeals Committee prior to or during the Appeals Committee Meeting (see Section 8).
- Each Appeals Committee Member prepares a preliminary analysis to be sent to the Appeals Committee Coordinator prior to the first Appeals Committee Meeting. The Appeals Committee meets once or more (face-to-face at the OAAA office, via teleconference or a combination of both) and must respond within 30 calendar days from the date of receiving the Appeal Submission. The Appellant is informed of the date and time of the Appeals Committee meetings.
- The meetings provide an opportunity for the Appeals Committee to consider the Appeals Submission, the preliminary analysis submitted by the Appeals Committee Members, and the response to the Appeals Submission from the EQA Panel (and OAAA Board, where relevant) (see Section 8). The Appeals Committee Chairperson guides Appeals Committee Members to reach consensus-based decisions informed by a thorough analysis and discussion of the documentation.
- In the event of the Appeals Committee not reaching a consensus-based decision during the meeting and/or needing further information, the Appeals Committee may request clarification from the Appellant and/or OAAA.
- Evidence in support of the appeal cannot be accepted by the Appeals Committee unless the Appellant can demonstrate that the evidence existed before the evidence deadline for the EQA (i.e. the last day of the EQA Visit). The Committee may require the Appellant to explain why the evidence was not made available to the EQA Panel during the EQA process.

- The Appeals Committee meets in private. The Appellant is not entitled to have representation at Appeals Committee meetings.
- The minutes of Appeals Committee meetings are prepared by the Appeals Committee Coordinator and circulated to the Appeals Committee for feedback. Meeting minutes and decisions are approved by the Appeals Committee Chairperson.
- The Appeals Committee Chairperson signs two documents commissioned by the Appeals Committee Coordinator; one document is addressed to the HEI and the other document is addressed to the OAAA CEO.
- The two documents, along with the minutes of the Appeals Committee meetings, are sent to the OAAA CEO who then communicates the decision to the Appellant. The outcome of the appeal process is posted on the OAAA website.
- The post-appeal EQA Report is prepared based on the Appeals Committee decision and is submitted to the OAAA Board for approval.

## 10 APPEALS COMMITTEE DECISIONS

The Appeals Committee makes the final appeal decision and EQA results are amended by the OAAA only on the Committee's directions. The Appeals Committee's decisions are limited to the options set out in the following sections.

### *10.1 Appeal Result Options for Institutional Accreditation*

#### 10.1.1 Institutional Quality Audit

- a. The Final Report is released without amendments (apart from indicating that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld).
- b. The Final Report is released with amendments to the conclusions (CARs) made by the OAAA.

#### 10.1.2 Institutional Standards Assessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and amended in the Final Report by the OAAA.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Conditionally Accredited').
- d. The length of any conditional accreditation or probation period is amended by the OAAA. The amended length of any conditional accreditation or probation period is reflected in the Final Report.

#### 10.1.3 Institutional Standards Reassessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly .
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Conditionally Accredited'). This may result in a second conditional accreditation or probation period, the length of which may be determined by the Appeals Committee. The Final Report is amended accordingly.
- d. The length of the second conditional accreditation or probation period is amended by the OAAA on the direction of the Appeals Committee. The amended length of the conditional accreditation or probation period is reflected in the Final Report.

## ***10.2 Appeal Result Options for Programme Accreditation***

### 10.2.1 Programme Standards Assessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Accredited').
- d. The length of the probation period is amended and reflected in the Final Report.

### 10.2.2 Programme Standards Reassessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Accredited'). This may result in a second probation period, the length of which may be determined by the Appeals Committee. The Final Report is amended accordingly.
- d. The length of the second probation period is amended and reflected in the Final Report.

## ***10.3 Appeal Result Options for General Foundation Programme Accreditation***

### 10.3.1 General Foundation Programme Quality Audit

- a. The Final Report is released without amendments (apart from indicating that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld).
- b. The Final Report is released with amendments made by the OAAA on the direction of the Appeals Committee.

### 10.3.2 General Foundation Programme Standards Assessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Accredited').
- d. The length of the probation period is amended and reflected in the Final Report.

### 10.3.3 General Foundation Programme Standards Reassessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report remains unchanged (apart from indicating that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld).
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the accreditation outcome amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Accredited'). This may result in a second probation period, the length of which may be determined by the Appeals Committee. The Final Report is amended accordingly.
- d. The length of the second probation period is amended and reflected in the Final Report.

## 11 THE APPEAL DECISION

- The Appeals Committee makes the final decision in accordance with the provisions of this *Appeals Manual* (see Section 10).
- The Appeals Committee decision is issued no later than 30 calendar days from the date of receiving the Appeal Submission from the HEI (see Section 7.3).

## 12 CONFIDENTIALITY

If the Appeal Application Form (see Appendix D) is received by the OAAA CEO within ten working days from the date that the HEI receives its Final Report and/or Accreditation Outcome, the results of the EQA and the publication of the EQA report are withheld. This period is referred to as the ‘embargo’ period. OAAA website (<http://www.oaaa.gov.om>) records the current status of that institution or programme as being ‘Under Appeal’. Details of the appeal proceedings, however, are confidential to the OAAA and the Appellant. The result of an appeal is reflected in the revised EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports).

## 13 COST OF APPEAL

The cost of lodging an appeal is structured to ensure that this action is undertaken with appropriate gravity.

- The fee for lodging an appeal against an OAAA Final Report or Accreditation Outcome is fixed regardless of an HEI’s classification. This fee is non-refundable irrespective of the nature or the outcome of the appeal.<sup>14</sup>
- An invoice is sent to the Appellant on receipt of an Appeal Application by the OAAA.
- The payment of the non-refundable appeal fee should be made prior to submission.

## 14 FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, an HEI may communicate with the OAAA by email ([ceooffice@oaaa.gov.om](mailto:ceooffice@oaaa.gov.om)) or by telephone (+968) 2412 1647. Alternatively, refer to the commonly asked questions given in this manual (see Appendix H).

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<sup>14</sup> For current information regarding the cost of an appeal, refer to OAAA Policy on Appeals Against EQA Activities, Reports and Decisions:  
<http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Policy/OAAA%20Policy%20on%20Appeals%20against%20External%20Quality%20Assurance%20Reports%20and%20Decisions.pdf>

**PART C: APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A: REFERENCES**

International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), *Guidelines of Good Practice* [online] (2016), available at: <http://www.inqaahe.org/guidelines-good-practice>

Ministry of Higher Education, *Requirements of Oman's System for Quality Assurance (ROSQA)* [online] (2001), available at: [http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Oman\\_ROSQA%20%28all%20part%20one%29.pdf](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Oman_ROSQA%20%28all%20part%20one%29.pdf)

Oman Academic Council (OAC), *Quality Audit Manual – Institutional Accreditation: Stage 1*, [online] (2008), available at: [http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst\\_Quality](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Quality)

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), *Institutional Standards Assessment Manual - Institutional Accreditation: Stage 2*, [online] (2016), available at: [http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst\\_Assessment\\_New](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Assessment_New)

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), 'OAAA Policy on Fees Charged for OAAA EQA Activities and Appeals', [online], available at: <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#OAAAPolicy>

## APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS AND TERMS

The following acronyms and terms are used in this *Appeals Manual*. See the OAAA Glossary for definitions of specific terms.<sup>15</sup>

Accreditation Outcome.....	The OAAA Board-approved result of an HEI's Standards Assessment
Appellant .....	The HEI lodging an appeal
Appeal Application.....	A form completed by the HEI indicating the name of the appealing institution, the EQA process under appeal and the Appellant's contact details
Appeal Submission.....	A documents that concisely explains the exact nature and details of all of the claims that comprise the appeal.
CARs .....	Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations (in Quality Audit Reports)
CEO .....	Chief Executive Officer
DCEO-TAD .....	Deputy Chief Executive Officer – Technical Affairs Division
EQA.....	External Quality Assurance
GFP.....	General Foundation Programme
GFPQA.....	General Foundation Programme Quality Audit
GFPSA .....	General Foundation Programme Standards Assessment
GFPSR.....	General Foundation Programme Standards Reassessment
HEI .....	Higher Education Institution
INQAAHE.....	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education <sup>16</sup>
IQA.....	Institutional Quality Audit
ISA .....	Institutional Standards Assessment
ISR.....	Institutional Standards Reassessment
Most senior representative.....	Generally the Vice-Chancellor of a university or Dean of a college (or those authorised on their behalf if unavailable)
OAAA .....	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAC .....	Oman Accreditation Council
PSA.....	Programme Standards Assessment
PSR.....	Programme Standards Reassessment
RD .....	Review Director
Report.....	Any report resulting from an OAAA EQA activity
ROSQA .....	Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Training.aspx#Glossary>

<sup>16</sup> [www.inqaah.org](http://www.inqaah.org)

**APPENDIX C: APPEALS COMMITTEE MEMBER DECLARATION FORM****OMAN ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION AUTHORITY****Appeals Committee Member Declaration Form (Sample Only)**

This standard External Reviewer (ER) declaration form (which may be embedded within a contract) should be used once the ER has received a written invitation from OAAA to join the Appeals Committee; this will be sent by the Appeals Committee Coordinator. ERs who receive such an invitation must sign this declaration before their participation on the Appeals Committee may be confirmed. Please send the form (typed and scanned) by email to the OAAA Appeals Committee Coordinator ([appeals@oaaa.gov.om](mailto:appeals@oaaa.gov.om)).

Declaration			
	Please tick (✓) the appropriate column for each of the following statements:	Agree	Disagree 17
1	I have read and understood the relevant EQA Manual [in this case, <i>Appeals Manual v4</i> ] and will carry out the tasks and responsibilities as set out in that manual and/or appendix to a contract.		
2	I understand the importance of the indicative timelines and/or deadlines agreed upon with OAAA for this EQA and agree to abide by them where this lies within my control or will seek permission from OAAA if an extension is required.		
3	I know of no conflict of interest, as set out in the relevant section of the EQA Manual (see Section 4.5), which would jeopardise my participation in this EQA activity.		
4	I have previously provided, or have submitted with this form, accurate and current biographical information and consent to this being edited and published on the OAAA website and otherwise used by OAAA for the purposes of this EQA activity.		
5	During the contract period and at any time thereafter, I will not breach the confidentiality of any information in relation to this EQA activity. This includes information received in written form (for example, the HEI's submission and supporting materials).		
6	During the contract period and at any time thereafter, I will not divulge any information shared during EQA [in this case, appeal] deliberations.		
7	I will not delegate work to another person (for example, asking a colleague to review one section or asking a secretary to download supporting materials) and recognise that the delegation of work to any person not approved by the OAAA Board to participate in this EQA activity constitutes a serious breach of confidentiality.		
8	I will complete any evaluation survey and/or end-of-activity report that is required by OAAA at the end of an EQA Activity [in this case, appeal] as part of OAAA's quality enhancement system.		
I acknowledge that I have read and accepted all the terms of this declaration.			
<b>Appeals Committee Member Name</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Signature</b>			
<b>Name of HEI (ie, the Appellant)</b>			

<sup>17</sup> If you indicate disagreement with any of the statements in the declaration above, the Appeals Committee Corodinator will be in touch with you to discuss the matter further.



**APPENDIX D: APPEAL APPLICATION FORM**

## Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

### Appeal Application Form

**Please read the *Appeals Manual (v4)* before submitting an appeal.**

This form is used to give notice to OAAA that a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is intending to submit an appeal. It should only be used by an HEI after receiving the Final Report of an External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity from OAAA. The completed form, the Appeal Fee and the Appeal Submission Form and Template, must be received within 60 calendar days from the date the HEI receives the Final EQA Report. **If an HEI wishes OAAA to suspend a Final Report or the Accreditation Outcome (as appropriate) before it is made public, OAAA must receive this notification of appeal *within 10 days* of the HEI receiving the Final EQA Report.** Please send the form (typed and scanned) by email to the CEO's Office at OAAA: [ceooffice@oaaa.gov.om](mailto:ceooffice@oaaa.gov.om).

Part A: Key Details	
HEI Name	
Date (month and year) of Receipt of Final EQA Report	
Date of Submission of this Appeal Application Form	
Type of EQA being Appealed Against (eg, ISA, ISR, PSA)	
If appealing against PSA, please name the programme <sup>18</sup>	
Intended Date of Appeal Submission	

Part B: Subject of Appeal		
Please tick (in the second column) only one of the following rows:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Row 1</b>	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Standards Assessment (ie, criteria ratings) <sup>19</sup> and/or We are appealing the length of the conditional accreditation or probation period	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Row 2</b>	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Quality Audit (ie, CARs)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part C: Communication			
List here the details of your HEI's contact person who may be approached by the OAAA in relation to this application:			
Contact Person's Name		Email	
Designation		Telephone	

Part D: Authority			
This Appeal Application Form is submitted for and on behalf of the HEI by the HEI's most senior representative:			
Representative's Name		Signature	
Designation		Date	

<sup>18</sup> If the appeal pertains to a programme, please provide the name of the programme (a separate Appeal Application Form must be lodged for each programme, unless they are nested programmes, such as Advanced Diploma within a Bachelor Degree).

<sup>19</sup> Note that the standard ratings and the accreditation outcome is calculated automatically from the criteria ratings.

**APPENDIX E: APPEAL SUBMISSION FORM AND TEMPLATE**

## Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

### Appeal Submission Form and Template

**Please read the current *Appeals Manual* before submitting an appeal.**

This form and template is used to submit an appeal to OAAA. It should be used by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) only after having given notice to OAAA of the intention to appeal (by submitting an Appeal Application Form) and only after paying a non-refundable Appeal fee. The submission must be received by the OAAA within 60 calendar days from the date the HEI receives the Final EQA Report. Please send this submission, together with supporting evidence, to the Appeals Committee Coordinator ([appeals@oaaa.gov.om](mailto:appeals@oaaa.gov.om)).

Part A: Key Details	
HEI Name	
Date (dd/mm/yyyy) of Receipt of Final EQA Report	
Date of Submitting this Appeal Submission Form and Template	
Type of EQA being Appealed Against (eg, ISA, ISR, PSA)	
If appealing against PSA, please name the programme <sup>20</sup>	

Part B: Subject of Appeal		
Please tick (in the second column) only one of the following rows:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Row 1</b>	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Standards Assessment (ie, criteria ratings) <sup>21</sup> and/or We are appealing the length of the conditional accreditation or probation period	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Row 2</b>	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Quality Audit (ie, CARs)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part C: Authority			
This Appeal Submission Form and Template is submitted for and on behalf of the HEI by the HEI's most senior representative:			
Representative's Name		Signature	
Designation		Date	

Appeal Submission Template: Appealing an EQA Result (add rows as required)				
Subject of Appeal		Grounds for Appeal		Suggested Criteria Ratings or CARs
No	Criterion or Scope Area	Current Ratings or CARs	Rationale (with supporting evidence) <sup>22</sup>	
1				
2				
3				

<sup>20</sup> If the appeal pertains to a programme, please provide the name of the programme (a separate Appeal Application Form must be lodged for each programme, unless they are nested programmes, such as an Advanced Diploma within a Bachelor Degree).

<sup>21</sup> Note that the standard ratings and the accreditation outcome is calculated automatically from the criteria ratings.

<sup>22</sup> The submission must be brief and to the point (from about 50 words to no more than 500 words per criterion or scope area, including the text of the EQA Report).

## **APPENDIX F: PREPARATION OF HEI SUBMISSIONS FOR AN APPEAL**

### **Aim of this Guidance Note**

The aim of this Guidance Note is to assist Higher Education Institutions (HEIs or Appellants) prepare a submission for an appeal against the results of an EQA process.

### **The Appeals Committee**

The purpose of forming the Appeals Committee is to provide external scrutiny of EQA processes to ensure that they were conducted as per established practice stipulated in the relevant EQA manual. It achieves that by considering the comments of HEIs on Draft Report v5 and subsequent amendments made to the Final Report. Appeals Committees are authorised to make decisions and direct OAAA to make any changes to Final Reports consistent with the scope of their authority as an Appeals Committee. OAAA adopts this scrutiny as a means to confirm that obligations for transparency and fairness are being met in undertaking EQA processes. Appeals Committee members are drawn from those who have had no involvement in the original EQA process and, to avoid any potential conflict of interest, HEIs are consulted before Committee membership is confirmed.

### **Subject of Appeal**

The *Appeals Manual* (see Section 6) contains the formal statement of circumstances in which it is possible for an HEI to appeal and the key implications for HEIs considering if they have a case for appeal.<sup>23</sup> While there is no ambiguity in the rights of an HEI to lodge an appeal, institutions are advised to weigh up the implications of the following important factors before they proceed:

- The philosophy and international context for conduct of OAAA accreditation processes (The Accreditation Context)
- The requirements for a successful Appeals Submission (Preparation of the Appeal Submission)

Both the above are considered in more detail below.

### **The Accreditation Context**

The OAAA approach to accreditation and appeals has been designed to mirror, for the context in Oman, what is recognised as international best practice in accreditation by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). INQAAHE is a world-wide association of near 300 quality assurance and accreditation agencies.

### **The OAAA Framework**

The OAAA framework, together with audit scope areas and standards for accrediting institutions and their programmes, have been developed with reference to international good practice in addition to what might be perceived as 'excellent' in the national context. As a result, accreditation judgements are made against standards that are benchmarked internationally rather than according to an institution's own idea of its level of excellence.

EQA Panels are drawn from trained international and locally-based reviewers who have extensive knowledge and experience of the higher education sector. The composition of the EQA Panel is finalised with input from the HEI undertaking EQA, firstly to guard against any conflict of interest that would interfere with the capacity of the Panel to make informed and fair judgements on the HEI's case and, secondly, to ensure an appropriate mix of specialist knowledge and language proficiency. Relationships between OAAA and HEIs are collegial and professional with opportunities for HEI input throughout the EQA process. To ensure transparency in the sector, notification of the receipt of an appeal application, and subsequently the outcome of the appeal, are made public by OAAA including on the website.

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<sup>23</sup> See Appendix G for a Guidance Note for Appeals Committee Members.

### ***Features of OAAA Processes***

There are many milestones on the road to achieving institutional and programme accreditation (commencing with quality audit). Where institutions are initially unsuccessful in achieving accreditation the OAAA framework includes the possibility of outcomes such as ‘On Probation’ or ‘Conditionally Accredited’ that allow further opportunities for HEIs to be reassessed where necessary. Each HEI may have up to three opportunities to gain accreditation.

HEIs have the opportunity to raise concerns up to the end of the final day of an EQA Visit (as indicated in the relevant EQA Manual), if an HEI considers that EQA Visit processes are being conducted in a prejudicial manner. HEIs are provided with an opportunity to submit their comments and additional evidence on receipt of the v5 of the draft EQA Report that is prepared by the EQA Panel. The HEI comments can include factual inaccuracies, emphases considered prejudicial, omission of a significant aspect of the HEI’s operation and commentary based on key matters manifestly not considered by the Panel.

Appeals against EQA formal results are conducted by an Appeals Committee, appointed by OAAA but which operates independently. The Appeals Committee has international membership and is led by an experienced Chair. The Appeals Committee has the authority to make the final decisions on an appeal and to direct the OAAA Board to take any necessary actions (such as to change criteria ratings or formal conclusions of an EQA).

### ***Preparation of the Appeal Submission***

In the event an HEI decides to proceed with lodging an appeal, a submission needs to be prepared within the timelines set out in the *Appeals Manual*. The submission needs to be submitted in soft copy using the form and template available from OAAA (Appendix E); this submission must be brief and to the point (for example, from about 50 words to no more than 500 words per criterion, including the text of the EQA Report) and should include evidence.

Before proceeding to compile a submission, HEIs should carefully review the *Appeals Manual* (particularly Sections 5 and 6) outlining the scope of the Appeals Committee and the grounds for Appeal. This is to ensure that the HEI understands the grounds and subject of appeal and the range of potential decisions open to the Appeals Committee.<sup>24</sup>

For each aspect or point being disputed by the HEI the submission needs to include:

- Identification of the ‘Subject’ of the appeal (See Section 6, *Appeals Manual*)
- An indication of the ‘Grounds’ on which the Appeal is being made, such as significant factual misinterpretation of evidence which the HEI already attempted to correct (See Section 5, *Appeals Manual*)
- Evidence to support the appeal

The Subject of the Appeal needs to relate to EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) as the Appeals Committee remit is limited to these areas. The HEI needs to carefully define the points on which they wish to appeal to ensure these are within the authority of the Appeals Committee.

The next step is to identify the Grounds on which the appeal will be based as outlined in the *Appeals Manual*. It is essential to nominate one or more of these Grounds for each point disputed. The following step to be considered in framing the appeal is the selection of evidence that will be provided to support the Appeal. In each case this should directly relate to the Subject and Grounds and, as with all HEI evidence,

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<sup>24</sup> See Appendix G for a Guidance Note for Appeals Committee Members.

must have been in existence before the final day of the EQA Visit. As a general rule, this evidence should be new (that is, evidence that has not been already submitted to the EQA Panel).

There is no benefit to be gained by the HEI from including matters that are not directly related to the Subject and Grounds. Also there is nothing to be gained in resubmitting information that has already been provided to the EQA Panel before the completion of the Final Report unless there is firm evidence that the EQA Panel Members misinterpreted or ignored that evidence or the evidence forms part of a new compilation or argument.

If the evidence being submitted to support the HEI appeal argument is part of aggregated set of evidence there should be clear directions for the Appeals Committee to locate the specific data or evidence. It is crucial that the HEI's case is not based on assertions that are unsupported by evidence. Nor are any of the following types of argument helpful within an appeal framework:

- Critique of the OAAA framework or standards (as this is not up for debate in the context of an appeal)
- Viewpoints that show the HEI does not accept that EQA processes (as these are based on the considered judgement of a panel of experts, using international benchmarks, rather than the institution's sense of its own position in the sector)
- Suggestions that the collective judgements made by the panel are not legitimate, or suggestions that the panel as a whole is insufficiently qualified to make those judgements (as Panels are comprised of QA experts who apply individual judgement based on evidence)
- Questioning, without evidence, the capacity or impartiality of one or more members of the panel or suggesting that the panel is not properly constituted
- Arguments that the existence of a plan, with or without an allocation of resources (for example to purchase new equipment) is sufficient basis for saying that aspect of the HEI operations is satisfactory or even exemplary
- Suggestions that the report fails to adequately recognise recent improvements or plans for improvement since this demonstrates a lack of understanding of EQA processes which are about judgements of demonstrable achievements against the OAAA scope areas or standards at a point in time; in other words, a full ADRI cycle needs to be demonstrated, wherein results and improvements are shown to be deliberately attained rather than arrived at by chance
- Seeking to change the text, including the tone of the report text, for example, by adding more discussion on areas of strong achievement or de-emphasising weaker areas
- Arguments that a change to standard processes, as set out in the EQA Manual, *previously negotiated and agreed in writing* between HEI and OAAA have disadvantaged the HEI
- Claims that it is not legitimate for an aspect of the HEI operations to be considered in different contexts in the report (for example, claims about academic integrity in ISA Standard 2 may be applicable to other areas of the HEI's operations).

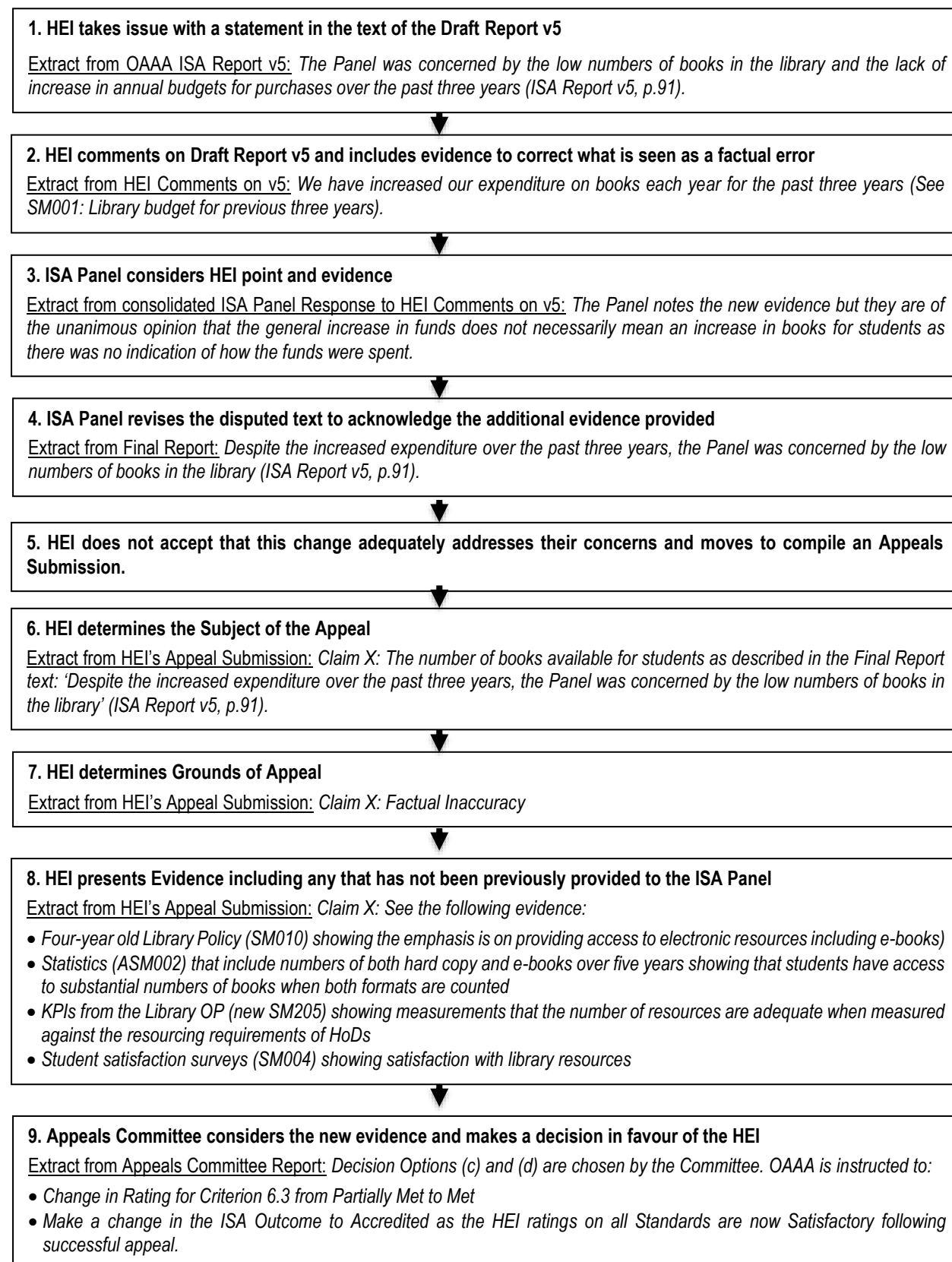
### **Features of an Effective Appeal Submission**

The Appeal Submission needs to be structured so that the Appeals Committee members can see the line of argument from the HEI's Subject of appeal, the Grounds on which the appeal is being advanced and the evidence to support the argument. The Committee meets in private so the Appellant (the HEI) is not entitled to representation. In this situation clarity and careful presentation of relevant evidence in the Appeals Submission is essential.

The two examples below (Figures 3 and 4) show in brief the sequence of events in two appeals to demonstrate the logic underlying the appeals process and guide the preparation of an Appeal Submission. Figure 3 shows a hypothetical example leading to a successful appeal while Figure 4 shows an example leading to an unsuccessful appeal.

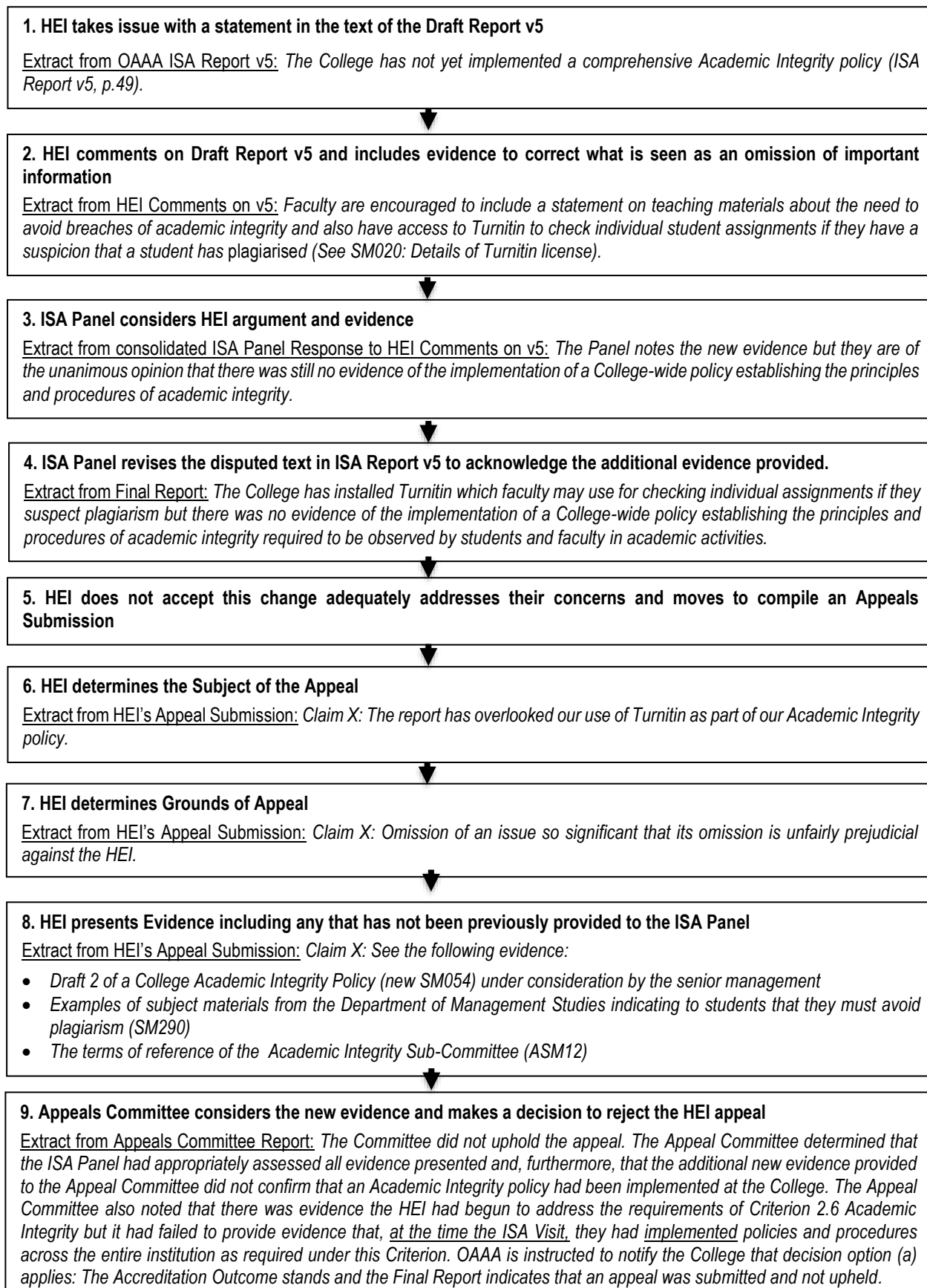
### Figure 3: Example of a Successful Appeal

This abbreviated (fictitious) example demonstrates the sequence of events leading to a successful appeal by an HEI.



#### Figure 4: Example of an Unsuccessful Appeal

This abbreviated (fictitious) example demonstrates the sequence of events leading to an unsuccessful appeal by an HEI.



## APPENDIX G: GUIDANCE NOTE FOR APPEALS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### Aim of this Guidance Note

The aim of this Guidance Note is to assist Appeals Committee members carry out their responsibilities in considering appeals submitted by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs or Appellants) against EQA Results.<sup>25</sup>

### The Appeals Committee

The purpose of forming the Appeals Committee is to provide external scrutiny of EQA processes to ensure that they were conducted as per established practice stipulated in the relevant EQA manual. It achieves that by considering the comments of HEIs on Draft Report v5 and subsequent amendments made to the Final Report. Appeals Committees are authorised to make decisions and direct OAAA to make any changes to Final Reports consistent with the scope of their authority as an Appeals Committee. OAAA adopts this scrutiny as a means to confirm that obligations for transparency and fairness are being met in undertaking EQA processes. Appeals Committee members are drawn from those who have had no involvement in the original EQA process and, to avoid any potential conflict of interest, HEIs are consulted before Committee membership is confirmed.

### Grounds for Appeal

The OAAA *Appeals Manual* describes the circumstances in which it is possible for an HEI to appeal:

- An Appeal Committee may only accept an Appeal subject to the terms and conditions set out in this *Appeals Manual*
- Only an appeal against EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) approved by the OAAA Board relating to OAAA's EQA activities is admissible
- Appeals may only relate to matters raised by an Appellant in its comments on Draft Report Version 5 (v5), and/or any subsequent changes made by OAAA after the HEI submits its comments on Draft v5 that have not been requested by the Appellant

Since the formal conclusions are finalised by the EQA Panel *after* the HEI has provided OAAA with, firstly, any additional information requested by the EQA Panel during the EQA Visit for supply after the Visit and, secondly, its response to v5 of the draft EQA report, it follows that appeals are limited to consideration of processes that occur from the day after the EQA Visit to the date on which OAAA provides the Final Report to the HEI. Other mechanisms are in place to allow HEIs to provide input to processes as the EQA proceeds from the establishment of the EQA Panel through the planning and conduct of the EQA Visit. These mechanisms are outlined in OAAA EQA manuals (for example, in the *Institutional Standards Assessment Manual*, 2016 under the heading 'Disputes and Appeals').

### Guiding Principles in Assessing Grounds for Appeal

In dealing with HEI comments on v5 of the draft EQA report, OAAA expectations are that the following two principles will be observed:

- The EQA Panel will follow agreed OAAA procedures for considering additional requested evidence and the HEI comments in determining EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports).
- Results from the EQA will be demonstrably based on a fair and thorough consideration of the additional evidence and commentary provided in the HEI comments on v5 of the draft EQA report.

In cases where the HEI has evidence that these principles have not been observed they have an opportunity to submit an appeal for consideration by the Appeals Committee with reference to the *Grounds* for appeal. Appeals may be accepted if they align with the following grounds:

- *Significant factual inaccuracies that the HEI has already tried to correct by providing the appropriate evidence to the EQA Panel.*

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix F for a Guidance Note for HEIs (Appellants).



- **Emphases** or perspectives taken by the EQA Panel **that are unfairly prejudicial** against the HEI and lead to unfair results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports)
- The **omission of an issue** so significant that its omission is **unfairly prejudicial** against the HEI and results in unfair results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports)
- The EQA process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair **and deviated from the relevant EQA manual** in a manner that had not been agreed by both parties.
- The formal results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) **are manifestly at odds** with the respective commentary in the Report

(See Section 5.1 above [Emphasis added])

It is important to note that the grounds for appeal do not accommodate challenges to the validity of EQA Panel judgements or conclusions but instead are focused on **how** the Panel reached its conclusions and on ensuring that the EQA Panel considerations of the evidence were not conducted in an unfair or arbitrary manner.

### Appeals Committee Methodology

The methodology to be used by the Appeals Committee in considering an appeal is set out in the *Appeals Manual*

*It should be noted that **the appeal represents tertiary analysis** (of an institution or programme, including GFP). Primary analysis is undertaken by an HEI through self-study or self-assessment. Secondary analysis, designed to check the validity of the primary analysis, is carried out through OAAA's EQA processes. Tertiary analysis is undertaken by the Appeal Committee **focusing on whether the secondary analysis was conducted as per established practice** (for example, where the text does not support the outcome, or the appropriate evidence was overlooked or triangulation was not carried out). There is no remit given to the Appeals Committee to conduct a new secondary analysis. With this in mind, the Appeals Committee does not visit the Appellant's premises, nor does it interview staff or students.*

(See Section 4.1 above [Emphasis added])

The emphases added to the citation above highlight the key fact that the Appeals Committee is focused on conducting a *tertiary analysis*. The task for Committee members is mainly to follow the documentary trail for each point raised by the HEI and assess if the processes followed by the EQA Panel are consistent with EQA processes. The Appeals Committee methods focus on checking that the EQA Panel has been diligent and fair in dealing with the HEI comments on Draft v5 report, and any subsequent changes to the report, and that the EQA Panel has provided adequate justification in the Final Report for their determination of the EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports).

### Consideration of the Appeal Submission

The Appeals Coordinator forwards a range of documents to each Committee member:

- Appellant Appeal Submission
- Original HEI EQA submission
- EQA Report v5
- HEI's comments on v5
- Panel response to HEI comments on Report v5 and actions taken as a result
- Final EQA Report (indicating any changes made to EQA Report v6 by the OAAA Board)
- EQA Panel response to the Appellant's submission
- EQA RD's response to the Appellant's submission

The initial guiding questions for the Committee members in their analysis of the appeal documents are based on the OAAA principles for EQA Panels mentioned earlier:

- Have only matters raised by the Appellant in the HEI comments on Draft v5 of the Report (and/or any subsequent changes made by OAAA after the HEI submits its comments on Draft v5 that have not been requested by the Appellant) been raised?
- Were the processes followed by the EQA Panel (from the day after the end of the EQA Visit to the day the Final Report was sent) consistent with EQA processes as described in the EQA Manual?
- Were the EQA Panel Members manifestly fair, reasonable and thorough in their consideration of the evidence and commentary provided in the HEI comments on Draft v5 of the Report?

Examples of more specific questions to be considered by each Appeals Committee member in their initial analysis of the documentation are:

- Has the EQA Panel been diligent in addressing each of the points raised by the HEI in responding to the Draft v5 report?
- Do the comments by Panel members in their responses to points raised by the HEI reflect a thoughtful and respectful approach to the concerns of the HEI?
- Do the documents indicate that new evidence provided on request after the EQA Visit was analysed and used and that previously supplied evidence was re-checked where facts were disputed by the HEI?
- Is there evidence that the EQA Panel carefully considered HEI comments on Draft v5 of the Report that they had been unfair to the HEI in one or more formal conclusions?
- Does the outcome arise logically from the text (for example, does positive text lead to a negative outcome, or *vice versa*)?
- Did the Panel record adequate justification in rejecting any of the HEI's comments on Draft v5 of the Report?

In summary, the role of individual Appeals Committee Members in examining the Appeals submission and other documentation is limited to checking that EQA processes for dealing with the HEI comments on Draft v5 of the Report have been followed and a spirit of fairness has prevailed throughout. Appeal Committee Members do not re-analyse the breadth of evidence presented and analysed by the Panel during the entire EQA exercise; their focus is on ensuring that the EQA *processes* that take the report from Draft v5 to a Final Report have been properly implemented according to the EQA Manual.

At the end of their individual work analysing the full set of appeal documents, each Appeals Committee member compiles a preliminary response. This includes any views on potential changes to EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) to be discussed by the Appeals Committee as a whole. These individual responses are forwarded to the Appeals Committee Coordinator.

### **Conduct of the Appeals Committee Meeting**

In preparation for the meeting of the Appeals Committee as a whole, the Appeals Committee Coordinator collates all individual responses into one document, prepares templates to guide the Committee's deliberations and decision process and organises the agenda papers and logistics for the meeting.

The Committee meets in private and as such the Appellant (the HEI) is not entitled to representation. If the Appeals Committee is unable to reach a consensus there are provisions for it to seek additional input from the Appellant. During the meeting the Chairperson of the Committee leads members through the Submission, point by point, and seeks a Committee consensus on each point.

The Committee has the authority to make one of the decisions listed earlier in this manual (see Section 10). It is not possible for the Appeals Committee to make changes to the text of the Final Report, for example, to the wording or the tone of the Report. The Appeals Committee has the authority, however, to direct OAAA to make changes to the Final Report to reflect its decision on the Appeal, for example, to implement a change in ratings and outcome.

Since the Appeals Committee is vested with the authority to make the final decision the meeting concludes with a determination of the final appeal decision. If the Appeals Committee is unable to reach a consensus there are provisions for it to seek additional input from the Appellant and/or OAAA before further consideration of the case.

The Chairperson signs the official Appeals decision documents, one for the HEI and one for the CEO of OAAA who has the responsibility of conveying the result of the Appeal to the Appellant and ensuring the post-appeal version of the Final EQA Report is submitted to the OAAA Board for approval. The CEO is also responsible for making public, for example through the OAAA website, the result of the Appeal. A detailed record of the meeting(s) is archived with minutes subsequently sent to members for ratification.

## APPENDIX H: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs are intended to provide brief answers to frequently asked questions. The *Appeals Manual*, however, is the definitive source of information and should be referred to for a more complete response.

### Question 1 Why does the OAAA have an appeal process?

Answer An appeal process is important to ensure the fairness and validity of Oman's higher education quality management system and is in line with the national requirements in Oman. The international body (INQAAHE) advises all its members, including OAAA, to establish a consistent way of managing complaints about their procedures or modes of operation. INQAAHE also advises members to have clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to external review and decision-making processes (see Section 1.4).

### Question 2 May anyone (for example, a lecturer) request an appeal?

Answer No. Only those in specifically designated positions may submit an Appeal Application Form and the Appeal Submission Form and Template to the OAAA (see Section 7.1).

### Question 3 Does the Appellant (i.e. the HEI) have an opportunity to challenge the membership of the Appeals Committee?

Answer The OAAA takes every effort to avoid conflicts of interest and consults the Appellant in this regard (see Section 4.5.2).

### Question 4 Are the appeal proceedings and results made public?

Answer The details of appeals are not public as they relate to EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) that may or may not be in the public domain (see Section 12). The fact that an appeal is underway, however, is made public in order to provide the public with information about the status of an HEI or programme. The results of an appeal are made public through revised conclusions in Quality Audit Reports or Accreditation Outcomes and/or ratings published on the OAAA website (see Section 12).

### Question 5 Can an HEI appeal against the results of an appeal?

Answer No. The Appeals Committee's decision is final (see Section 11).

### Question 6 Why aren't appeals managed independently of the OAAA? Isn't that a conflict of interest?

Answer Each Appeals Committee is made up of people who had no involvement in the original EQA process and no other conflict of interest (see Section 4.5). The OAAA process is in line with the INQAAHE *Guidelines of Good Practice* which indicate that appeal processes can be managed by the EQA Activities (see Section 1.4), and there are international benchmarks for this model.

### Question 7 What is the difference between an 'appeal' and a 'complaint'?

Answer Complaints may arise from a wide variety of issues and these are usually possible to resolve informally between concerned parties. In some cases, the OAAA's manuals set out processes for managing complaints that apply to specific types of EQA processes. An appeal is a very specific request to the OAAA to change EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) (see Section 4.4.1).

**Question 8 Does an appeal have to be conducted in English?**

Answer The appeal should normally be carried out in the language of the original EQA activity. This should be confirmed with the Chairperson of OAAA Board at the time that the Appeal Application Form is presented to the OAAA (see Section 3.3).

**Question 9 Are appeals common internationally?**

Answer All EQAAs (like the OAAA) are advised by INQAAHE to have an appeals process (see Section 1.4). That said, appeals are not common and should be made only in exceptional circumstances.

**Question 10 Why do we have to indicate our intended Appeal Submission date on the Appeal Application Form?**

Answer Giving an indication of the date on which you propose to submit your Appeal enables OAAA to plan their resources accordingly and to convene an Appeals Committee within the timelines stated within this *Appeals Manual*.

