Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Report of an Audit of the

University of Buraimi

December 2016

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This Quality Audit Report (the 'Report') documents the findings of a Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) of the University of Buraimi (UoB). It comments on UoB's Mission and Vision, and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its systems for achieving that Mission and Vision. Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman's institutional accreditation process. It is designed to provide a level of assurance to the public about the quality of UoB's activities and constructive feedback to the University to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with UoB undertaking a self study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarized in their *Quality Audit Portfolio* (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the due date of 10 January 2016.

The OAAA appointed an external Audit Panel (the 'Panel'), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the Quality Audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 22 February 2016 to consider UoB's Portfolio. Following this, a representative of the Audit Panel Chairperson and the Review Director undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to UoB on 16 March 2016 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel's Audit Visit.

Prior to the Audit Visit, the Panel invited submissions from the public about the quality of UoB's activities. One submission was received and considered by the Panel.

The Audit Visit took place over 24-28 April 2016. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 120 people, including governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. They also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

No documents created after 28 April 2016 (being the last day of the Audit Visit) were taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit.

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

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAAA Board on 28 December 2016.

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

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Each OAAA Audit Report is written primarily for the institution being audited. The Report is specifically designed to provide feedback to help that institution better understand its own strengths and opportunities for improvement. The feedback is structured according to nine broad areas of activity and presented as formal Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations, or as informal suggestions, each accompanied with explanatory paragraphs. It is expected that the institution will act upon this feedback as part of its continuous efforts to provide the best possible education to students.

The Report is made public because it also may be of interest to students and potential students, their families, employers, government, other higher education institutions in Oman and abroad, and other audiences. Students, in particular, may find this Report useful because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2, 6 and 7 below). However, prospective students should still undertake their own investigations when deciding which higher education institution will best serve their particular learning needs.

Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman's two-stage process for institutional accreditation. Its focus is formative (developmental) rather than summative. In other words, although the audit addresses nine areas of activity which are common to all institutions, it does not measure the institution against externally set standards of performance in those nine areas. Instead, it considers how well the institution is attending to those areas in accordance with its own Mission and Vision and in the context of relevant legal regulations. Therefore, Quality Audit recognises that each institution has a unique purpose and profile; it does not directly compare one institution with all the other institutions in Oman.

For these reasons, a Quality Audit does not result in a pass or fail; nor does it provide any sort of grade or score. It should also be noted that the precise number of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations that an institution receives in its Audit Report is not as important as the substance of those conclusions. For example, some Recommendations may focus on critical issues such as assessment of student learning, whereas others may focus on issues such as the maintenance of teaching equipment in classrooms which, while important, is clearly less critical. Therefore, it is neither significant nor appropriate to compare the Audit Reports of different HEIs solely on the numbers of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations.

The second stage in the institutional accreditation process is Standards Assessment. Unlike the Quality Audit, this stage, which will take place about four years after the Quality Audit, does provide a summative assessment against external standards in the same nine areas of activity. It should be noted that Oman also operates a system of accreditation/recognition for academic programmes, separately from the institutional accreditation process. For more information on Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education please visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

This Report contains a number of references to source evidence considered by the Audit Panel. These references are for the HEI's benefit in further addressing the issues raised. In most cases this evidence is not in the public domain.

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report, and are not prioritised. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Executive Summary of Findings

University of Buraimi (UoB) was established in 2010 as a private, non-profit University. The University is based in the Al Buraimi Governorate with a clear socio-economical intention to contribute to the economic development of the Buraimi region. At the time of the Audit, the University had around 2000 students, of which 80% were female. UoB offers 11 degree programs through its three Colleges: the College of Business (CoB), the College of Health Sciences (CoHS) and the College of Engineering (CoE). All degree programs are taught in English. The CoHS offers two programs: Nursing; and Optometry; CoB offers five programs: Management Information Systems; Business Administration and E-Business Management; Export Oriented Management; Islamic Finance and Banking; and Global Supply Chain and Management and Logistics. The CoE offers four programs: Civil Engineering; Architectural Engineering; Information and Communication Engineering; and Mechanical Engineering. All programs are designed to have exit awards at Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels as well as at Bachelor level. UoB also has a Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) that offers a General Foundation Program. Currently UoB has no affiliations for any of its existing programs; the University is working on establishing affiliations with overseas universities for its new programs.

The self-study was conducted by the University Quality Council (UQC) and working groups were constituted for the purpose. The Quality Audit Portfolio was prepared by the Writing of Institutional Review Report (WIRR) Committee established by the Vice Chancellor. There was little evidence of a University-wide approach to its self-study and many staff were not aware of the Quality Audit Portfolio. The University is encouraged to develop a more inclusive approach to its self-review activities in future to support a culture of quality improvement.

The Vision, Mission and Values are appropriately focused to achieve the University's goals of becoming a leading academic institute in teaching and research, distinguished locally and internationally. The University is currently governed by a Steering Committee which is the highest approval body, where decisions regarding strategies, policies and investment are decided. UoB is in the process of establishing its Board of Directors and Board of Trustees. At the time of the Audit Visit, the Steering Committee performed the functions of the Board of Trustees. The formation of the UoB Board of Directors and Board of Trustees needs to be a priority; there is a need for a separation between the oversight of financial and academic operations in the University. The Strategic Plan, including UoB's Mission, Vision and Values was revised in 2013. UoB has Accomplishment Plans to monitor progress with the Strategic Plan and an Operational Plan that supports the implementation of the Strategic Plan. However, the Strategic Plan needs more commitment at the top management level of the University.

The University has a recently revised organisational structure. The Vice Chancellor is supported by two Deputy Vice Chancellors: the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (DVC-AA) who is responsible for academic entities and offices and the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Financial and Administrative Affairs (DVC-FAA) who has responsibilities for financial and administrative operations. College Deans and the Director for the CFS plan, manage, and supervise the operations of the academic units. Administrative units are managed by Directors and report to either the Vice Chancellor or the DVC-FAA. The Vice Chancellor is also the Dean of the College of Business. There are a large number of key positions vacant or staff working in temporary positions. The University needs to consider the filling

of all vacant positions in the organisational structure to fulfill its Vision and Mission in particular in consideration of its future growth on a new campus.

The University has developed a set of generic attributes that all graduates should have attained upon graduation. The graduate attributes are aligned with the University Mission and Program Objectives (POs) and are reflected in Student Outcomes (SOs). The University needs to increase awareness and understanding of graduate attributes among staff, students and stakeholders. The University also needs to seek greater external input in the development and review of the curriculum of each program. UoB has a robust system for monitoring course and teaching effectiveness through student evaluations although more work is required to systematically ensure these insights lead to improvements. However the University needs to close the feedback loops with staff and students by sharing the actions taken in response to their feedback. Staff and student academic integrity is an area of concern and needs to be a priority. Though the first batch of students graduated in Academic Year 2014-2015, no award certificates have been issued to the graduates. The University needs to make this a priority and issue award certificates to students who have graduated. More efforts are also required to establish a system to track student destinations after graduation.

The University's Mission focuses on achieving progress in research and the Strategic Plan includes research as one of its goals. At the time of the Audit Visit, the University was in the process of developing a research framework. However, more efforts are required to build a research plan, finance, facilities and infrastructure for research that are supported by a robust research culture to meet the requirements of a University as outlined in the Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ROSQA).

Regarding industry and community service, the Strategic Plan includes a goal to engage with industry and community and has yearly action plans that are associated with this goal and strategy. Whilst there was some evidence of community engagement by various groups within the University, there was little evidence of implementation of community engagement activities in a planned manner. The University needs to ensure a systematic approach to the implementation of its activities.

UoB has a Student Information System (SIS) that serves the needs of the institution. SIS facilitates coordination between academic staff and academic support services to ensure that the needs of students are met. The University has an elected Student Advisory Council that works together with the Student Affairs Department and the Student Engagement and Academic Advisement Center to provide support for students. While this is a positive development, the University needs to establish mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Advisory Council.

The Human Resource Department is guided by the Human Resource Affairs Bylaws. Staff recruitment and retention are a challenge for the University. Given the number of vacant positions, along with recruitment, and retention issues, the University needs to explore ways to improve its recruitment and retention strategies. UoB provides professional development activities for academic and administrative staff. However UoB needs to have a systematic approach to its professional development activities.

The University has built a new campus and plans to move to its new campus in July 2016. The University envisages that the new campus will enhance its laboratory capacity, as well as state of art teaching facilities in classrooms and also enhance the capacity of the University to host public events for local and regional communities. The new campus and the associated expansion plans also demonstrate that the institution aims to ensure ample physical capacity is in place to accommodate student enrollment growth for the future.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

Summary of Affirmations

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

Summary of Recommendations

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

1   GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The University of Buraimi (UoB) is a private, non-profit University established in 2010 in the Al Buraimi Governorate, in the north-west of Oman, to contribute to the economic development of the Buraimi region. At the time of the Audit, the University was managed by a Steering Committee, which has direct supervision of all its functions. The University was in the process of constituting its Board of Directors and Board of Trustees.

This Chapter covers the Panel's findings about the governance and management of UoB including its Vision, Mission and Values; governance; management; institutional affiliations for programs and quality assurance; strategic plan; operational planning; financial management; risk management; policy management; entity and activity review systems; student grievance process; and health and safety.

1.1   *Mission, Vision and Values*

UoB's Mission is "Progress oriented education, research and engagement that contribute to quality of life, and learner centered experience enhanced by sustainable local and global partnerships" and its Vision statement is "Inspired Learning for Global Empowerment*"* (Portfolio, p.11). The Panel was pleased to see that the Mission and Vision were appropriately focused on both teaching and research, locally and internationally.

Values of the University comprise:

Integrity: Openness, consistency and honesty in all our actions;
Respect: where all students, staff and faculty are treated with the utmost respect regardless of religious, national or ethnic backgrounds;
Commitment: sustainable development of both internal and external stakeholders by means of purpose oriented educational initiatives;
Diversity: creating a true multicultural environment where students, staff, and faculty represent diverse nations, countries and cultures within the context of national priorities;
Excellence: a quality conscious community reflecting our pursuit of excellence in education through all our actions (Portfolio, p.12).

UoB states that a University Quality Council (UQC) was formed to revise its Vision, Mission and Values (Portfolio, p.11). UoB has clearly thought very carefully about its Vision, Mission and Values and they are appropriately focused to achieve the University's goals of becoming a leading academic institute in teaching and research, distinguished locally and internationally. However, the extent of stakeholder consultation in this process was less clear to the Panel. While UoB's Vision, Mission and Values are available on its website, in the Student Guide and posted around campus and discussed at faculty orientation,   these were not widely known to the staff of the University, even though graduate attributes have been mapped to Mission and Values in program and course documents.

The University relies on unit Action Plans and Accomplishment Reports to ensure the implementation and track the effectiveness of the achievement of its Mission, Vision, Values and strategic goals. The Panel found that the Mission and Vision were not necessarily guiding the University's practice. During interviews staff did not appear to understand how the Vision of "Inspired Learning for Global Empowerment" translated into their teaching and/or research practice. Whilst the Panel acknowledges that progress has been made to map graduate attributes to the Mission and Values of the University, there also needs to be more focus on establishing a stronger research-teaching link as part of the undergraduate program outcome.

The University's Mission also focuses on achieving progress in research that contributes to quality of life. UoB indicates that Student Learning by Research is not applicable to its overall assessment because it currently does not offer any program leading to Bachelor with honours or postgraduate research programs (Portfolio, p.47). Whilst the Panel found some evidence of research activity being incorporated in the undergraduate curriculum, especially in the final year project area, the lack of a planned approach to develop this aspect of the University's function was of concern (see Chapter 4).

The institutional classification defined in the prevailing Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ROSQA) specifies research as an important aspect of an institution classified as a University. In order to meet this requirement, the research mission component needs to be better articulated as a set of clear objectives, as it is not clear how this will be achieved given the current program offerings, future academic program expansion, and alignment between faculty and student research and offered programs. The senior management view that UoB will be able to meet this requirement within seven to ten years is not aligned with the current status of being a "University". The Panel urges UoB to address this issue.

> **Recommendation 1**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi establish a clear approach to meet the institutional requirements for a University as stated in the institutional classification in the Requirements of Oman Standards for Quality Assurance.**

1.2   *Governance*

UoB has a governance system that relies on a five level organisational structure to enable a smooth decision-making process (Portfolio, p.7). The Panel noted that UoB has a number of investors but that a formal Board of Directors (BoD) has not yet been established and urges UoB to establish a BoD with clear terms of reference. UoB is in the process of establishing a Board of Trustees (BoT). Currently the role of BoT is undertaken by a Steering Committee (SC). The Panel supports the preliminary action that the University has taken to formulate the Board of Trustees as described in the letter to the Ministry of Higher Education on 14 March 2016 and urges UoB to establish the BoT as soon as possible.

Although there is no BoT in place, UoB states that the BoT/ SC *(sic)* is the highest approval body, where strategies, policies, investment and orientations are decided (Portfolio, p.7). UoB also states that the BoT/SC is responsible for ensuring that rules, regulations, academic administration and administrative policies are implemented. The BoT/SC is expected to approve strategic matters, such as the establishment of new colleges, fees for academic programs, annual budget and the future plans for academic and administrative developments (Portfolio, p.14). At the time of the audit, the SC was responsible for both financial and academic issues. During interviews, the Panel noted uncertainty from staff about the roles and activities of this governing body due to the conflict of roles and responsibilities especially without the provision of additional oversight from an independent Board of Trustees. The Panel concluded that there is a lack of separation between the oversight of academic and financial operations of the University. The Panel urges UoB to establish its governance bodies to ensure separation of the oversight of its financial and academic issues to avoid conflict of interest.

> **Recommendation 2**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi establish its Board of Directors and Board of Trustees to ensure separation of its financial and academic governance.**

The Panel was informed that the Vice Chancellor is the Dean of the College of Business and Chair of the University Academic Council (UAC). The VC is also an ex-officio member of the Steering Committee. Article 20 of the University Bylaws indicates that "the Chair of the UAC has the authority to make decisions if he/she feels the Council majority vote is unsatisfactory". Given that the VC is currently the UAC Chair and ex-officio member of the Steering Committee, it falls to one person having ultimate veto and final decision-making rights. The dual role of the Vice Chancellor as the Dean of College of Business is sometimes confusing to staff members as they are not certain as to which role is being assumed by the VC/Dean at any given time. In order to ensure that all Colleges are treated fairly and to avoid occurrence of conflicting priorities, the Panel urges UoB to fill the position of the Dean of College of Business. The Panel concluded that the VC is currently holding too many positions and recommends that University of Buraimi needs to ensure clear separation of authority in its governance and management structures.

> **Recommendation 3**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi provide clear separation of authority in its governance and management structures and roles to ensure that key decision-making powers do not rest with a single individual.**

> **Recommendation 4**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi appoint a separate Dean for the College of Business in order to support the effective implementation of the organisational structure.**

1.3   Management

UoB's revised organisational chart shows a management structure that includes two Deputy Vice Chancellors: Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (DVC-AA) who is responsible for academic entities and offices, and the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Financial and Administrative Affairs (DVC-FAA) who is responsible for financial and administrative operations (Portfolio, p.15). The Panel acknowledges the progress made in relation to filling the positions of the Deputy Vice Chancellors. The Academic Units are managed and supervised by the College Deans and the Director for the Center of Foundation Studies (CFS) who report to the DVC-AA. Administrative units are managed by Directors who report to either the Vice Chancellor or the DVC-FAA (Portfolio, p.15). The revised organisational structure has not been populated entirely, and there are many staff in acting positions, some of whom were appointed only weeks before the Audit Visit (see Recommendation 31). As noted in Section 1.2, the Vice Chancellor is also the Dean of the College of Business.

The Panel heard from Deans and academic staff that the College Boards play an important role in the Colleges' decision-making processes, both at the College level and for raising issues to the University Academic Council. During interviews, the staff indicated the need for decision-making processes to be delegated more appropriately within the organisation; and greater consultation was needed across the organisation as most decision-making took place within the senior management of the organisation. For example, the Panel was informed that the agenda of the UAC requires approval from the Vice Chancellor, who also has a veto on any policy decisions made by the majority of the UAC if it deems the decisions to be "unsatisfactory". There were also instances of one-way communication, for example, decisions of the UAC are raised for approval to the Steering Committee, but there is no feedback back to the UAC from the Steering Committee regarding the outcomes of these decisions. The Panel concluded that more transparency about the Steering Committee's response to UAC decisions is required and urges UoB to address this issue.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi ensure its decision-making processes are inclusive, clearly communicated, and supported by a consultative approach throughout the organisation.

Various committees have been established to oversee academic and administrative functions such as quality assurance, laboratory management, and promotion. During interviews, academic staff indicated that due the high workload, their involvement in committees and related activities was detracting from their core responsibilities in teaching and research. While the Panel acknowledges the need for committees, there is a need to streamline the committee structure and monitor its effectiveness.

In terms of academic management, UoB undergraduate programs have three exit awards; Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Bachelor degree, as evident in the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) program license graduation notifications and staff interviews. By the end of academic year 2014-2015, 71 students had graduated (Portfolio, p.47) although graduates have only received transcripts as the award certificate is still being designed. The Panel urges UoB to expedite issuing award certificate to students who have graduated.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi issue award certificates to students who have graduated, as a matter of urgency.

1.4   *Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance*

UoB states that its approach to institutional affiliations has changed since the University's inception: originally the University signed an agreement with a consortium of six European universities for its programs in Engineering, Health Sciences and Commerce (Portfolio, p.16). However, these affiliations were not implemented. Currently UoB does not have any affiliation arrangements for its programs.

The Panel was informed that the University was working on an affiliation arrangement with Ulster University to externally validate the Nursing program. This affiliation will involve Ulster University having a validation role, including appointing external reviewers and ensuring there is external moderation of assessment. The College of Business is also working on an agreement to jointly conduct two programs with Stratford University, USA and one program with Alexandria University, Egypt. The Panel recognises that these affiliations can provide greater opportunities for internship and practice and greater nexus between research and teaching and encourages UoB to implement these affiliations to meet its strategic institutional goals one, seven and nine.

The University proposes to jointly issue two award certificates for the same program, one certificate from the University of Buraimi and second from the partner institutions: Stratford University for Bachelors in Business and Master in Business Administration; and Alexandria University for Bachelor of Law program. The practice of awarding two separate certificates for one single program raises the issue of double counting a single program outcome for two separate degrees. UoB needs to seek verification with the MoHE on the permissibility of awarding two degree certificates for a single program.

1.5   *Strategic Plan*

UoB's Strategic Plan clearly delineates a five-year plan from 2013-2017 with annual action plans. UoB's strategic goals are:

1. To engage in academic initiatives that encourage student centered and life-long learning
2. To promote research that serves the needs of society and addresses strategic issues
3. To invest in human and other resources that contribute to continued development
4. To prepare students for purposeful and successful careers that meet local, regional and global challenges
5. To create new knowledge and become a national repository of expertise.
6. To provide a conducive, supportive, and safe environment and facilities for the University community
7. To encourage and support activities that transform students into responsible global citizens
8. To engage with industry and the community to establish initiatives for common good
9. To provide the shareholders optimal value within the context of quality education
(Portfolio, pp.17-18).

UoB's Strategic Plan was developed by the University Quality Council (UQC) (Portfolio, p.18). UoB has made an effort to link its Strategic Plan to the institutional Mission/Values and establish annual milestones to accomplish its strategic goals. The Panel heard that the Strategic Plan not been formally signed off by the Steering Committee although the Colleges and departments have started to implement it. The Panel suggests that the status of the Strategic Plan be clarified to make the approval process more transparent and to show the commitment of the senior leadership team to the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan has action plans for every year starting from AY 2013-2014. Action plans result in an Accomplishment Report. UoB piloted this activity during Fall Semester AY 2015-2016, where individual departments and College submitted Accomplishment Reports that included a report on KPI achieved as well as a descriptive summary of challenges in meeting the target (Portfolio, p19). On consideration of the Accomplishment Report of Fall 2015-2016, the Panel did not find evidence of how corrective action identified from the Accomplishment Reports will be taken into the next cycle of Operational Planning or how this will inform the achievement of strategic goals. The Panel concluded that UoB needs to have an institutional approach that aligns all the individual departmental Accomplishment Reports to inform the achievement of its strategic goals.

1.6   *Operational Planning*

UoB's operational planning process is aligned with its Strategic Plan and the responsibility for the implementation of action plans rests with the Heads of Departments (Portfolio, p.19). Units prepare a yearly action plan where clear activities are identified and mapped to the appropriate University goals, resources are identified and key performance indicators (KPI) are developed. On consideration of the documentation, it was not clear to the Panel how the individual departmental action plans are communicated at an institutional level to inform senior management about the effectiveness of implementation of the Operational Plan. The Panel urges UoB to align the departmental KPIs at an institutional level.

> **Recommendation 7**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi ensure that its individual departmental action plans are linked to institutional key performance indicators and targets.**

1.7   Financial Management

UoB is a private and not for profit University established by Al Buraimi Company for Education Services, which is a Limited Liability Company (Portfolio, p.13). Financial management and accounting is monitored through the Steering Committee and an annual external audit (Portfolio, p.20). The Vice Chancellor has multiple roles in terms of financial management: for example the VC oversees the internal audit function; the VC is the line manager for the DVC-FAA; and is an ex-officio member of the Steering Committee which is responsible for financial planning, budget and allocation of resources. The Panel urges UoB to address this issue (see Recommendation 2).

UoB states that capital and operational budgets are proposed at the beginning of each academic year and forwarded to the VC through the DVC-FAA (Portfolio, p.20). DVC-FAA undertakes a consultative process with the Deans and Heads of respective units and together they finalise the budget. During interviews, staff indicated that the process had improved markedly under the leadership of the new DVC-FAA and they acknowledged the consultative nature of the process.

1.8   Risk Management

UoB's Risk Management Policy is still under development and currently the focus on risk management is in five areas only: Information Security, Fire Safety, Health and Safety, Medical and Financial Management (Portfolio, p.21). The Panel, however, found no formal risk management system in place to address these risks. It is clear that UoB has invested a lot of money in building the new campus, while, in terms of income, more than 90% of students are sponsored by the MoHE. UoB has acknowledged the risk involved in the lack of diversified income as the MoHE fees for sponsored students are its only source of income. Given that UoB is heavily dependent upon the MoHE sponsored students, the Panel urges UoB to address this risk.

UoB acknowledges that it is heavily dependent on Information Technology (IT) and automation of operations, and needs to adopt IT security measures across the University. Whilst there is regular backup of data relating to all information, including student information, in a secure manner across different servers inside the University campus, the Panel observed that there was no back up on sites outside of University locations. UoB will need to address this risk in the future.

The Panel concluded that UoB needs to develop policies and procedures related to risk in all areas including academic areas and needs to develop broader systems of risk management to identify, monitor and mitigate risk.

> **Recommendation 8**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a comprehensive and robust risk assessment and management system to identify, monitor and mitigate risks.**

1.9   Policy Management

The University states that it "has a clear philosophy on the development and approval of its internal rules, regulations and policies. Such a philosophy adopts a bottom-up approach where units can initiate and based on the needs (*sic*), the development of any specific policy that may contribute to a more efficient operational environment" (Portfolio, p.22). UoB presented a number of individual policies and stated that it has "an adequate progression towards a complete policy management system" and states that its current policies are eligible to be reviewed every two years (Portfolio, p.23). However, the Panel did not find evidence of an appropriate mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and procedures. The status of the Policy Development Review Policy itself and other policy documents offered as samples is

unclear as they had not been formally approved. The Panel was informed that the policy development procedure as stated in the Policy Development Review Policy is not followed consistently and that some policies had been introduced without stakeholder consultation. This requires an effective approval process to secure the review and management of policy within the institution. The Panel urges UoB to address this area.

> **Recommendation 9**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a systematic process for developing, approving, disseminating and reviewing policies.**

1.10   *Entity and Activity Review Systems*

UoB states that it has a clear organisational structure that supports entity or activity review (Portfolio, p.23). UoB also aims to develop a systematic approach to the review process with the help of the Quality and Accreditation Department (QAD) and the Internal Audit Department to assure the quality of the University's functions and policies (Portfolio, p.24). UoB has recently appointed an Acting Director for the QAD but both QAD and the Internal Audit Department are not yet fully staffed. There was evidence of a review cycle in a number of areas such as the improvement of teaching and learning in some parts of the CFS. The conduct of course evaluations was also evident, where students complete evaluations every semester, and this data is subsequently used in some of the Colleges for one-to-one conversations about teaching performance between the Dean and academic staff. However, this practice was not evidenced across all Colleges of UoB.

Some of the other review activities undertaken by UoB include a review of its Vision and Mission; Organisational Structure; and a review of the Business Program Curricula and Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering program. While the Panel acknowledges that these review activities have taken place, it was concerned about the overall lack of actual data related to performance, and more importantly, trend data to inform improvement and decision making. Across many of the functions of the University, the Panel found evidence that an approach to the review system had been developed. However, the Panel did not find evidence in terms of entity and activity review results, and mechanisms in place to systematically use results to improve the University's functions. The Panel urges UoB to ensure that there is a framework in place for consistently undertaking reviews of the University's functions that specifically uses appropriate measures (quantitative and/or qualitative) to demonstrate results that are then used to inform improvement. In addition, this approach needs to include appropriate feedback loops to those stakeholders who are included in the review processes.

> **Recommendation 10**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi establish a review framework to systematically review University functions and activities that includes a consistent set of principles and processes for the undertaking of reviews, the provision of reports, the provision of appropriate feedback loops and to use results to inform improvements.**

1.11   *Student Grievance Process*

The Student Affairs Department and Student Engagement and Academic Advertisement Centre (SEAAC) deal with complaints related to academic support and other support services and that the Admission and Registration Department (ARD) deals with complaints regarding academic grades (Portfolio, p.25). A complaint form is available for students to complete online. The Panel found that both staff and students were aware of the outcomes and the processes in place for

managing and processing student grievances. UoB has an appeals process included in its student guide. However, the Panel did not find any evidence of how grievances are systematically reviewed to inform improvements across functions of UoB. The Panel encourages the University to develop mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of its grievance process.

1.12   *Health and Safety*

According to UoB, strategic goal six is "to provide a conducive, supportive, and safe environment and facilities for the University community" and the action plans derived from this goal aim to ensure "provision and maintenance of a healthy and safe work environment for all the members of the UoB" (Portfolio, p.26).

The Panel found that most of the staff managing and coordinating laboratories were aware of safety issues and the need to ensure a safe work environment, although they were not aware of a system or set of standards that apply institution-wide. UoB has drafted a Health and Safety Policy which is expected to be implemented in Fall Academic Year 2016-17 (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel agrees with UoB that there is an opportunity to improve the prioritising and maintenance of a healthy and safe work environment and supports its efforts in this area.

> **Affirmation 1**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that the University of Buraimi needs to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to addressing health and safety to ensure provision and maintenance of a healthy and safe work environment for all the members of the University of Buraimi and supports its efforts to address this.**

UoB also states that students who are sent overseas for training are provided with medical insurance cover by the University as part of health and safety measures (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel supports UoB in this area.

1.13   *Oversight of Associated Entities (e.g. owned companies)*

This section is not applicable to UoB.

2   STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

UoB has three Colleges: the College of Business (CoB); the College of Health Sciences (CoHS); and the College of Engineering (CoE) as well as a Center for Foundation Studies (CFS). The CFS offers the General Foundation Program to prepare students for entry into the degree and diploma programs in the Colleges.

The University currently offers 11 degree programs, which are taught in English. The CoHS offers two programs: Nursing; and Optometry. Five programs are offered by the CoB: Management Information Systems; Business Administration and E-Business Management; Export Oriented Management; Islamic Finance and Banking; and Global Supply Chain and Management and Logistics. Four programs are offered by the CoE: Civil Engineering; Architectural Engineering; Information and Communication Engineering; and Mechanical Engineering. All programs at the post Foundation level follow a credit hour-based system. All programs offered by UoB at the time of the audit have at least 131 credit hours or a maximum of 165 credit hours, which is higher than the required number of credit hours set by the Oman Qualification Framework (Portfolio, pp.29-30). At the time of the audit, the University had a student population of approximately 2300 students.

UoB Strategic Plan for 2013-2017 includes the following goals of particular relevance to teaching and learning and quality education:

- *To engage in academic initiatives encourage student-centered and lifelong learning*
- *To prepare students for purposeful and successful careers that meet local, regional, and global challenge* (Portfolio, p.17).

UoB indicates that the above goals are in complete alignment with the "Inspired Learning" concept indicated in the Vision statement of the University, as well as the "learner-centered experience enhanced by local and global partnership" highlighted in the Mission statement (Portfolio, p.32).

This Chapter reflects the findings of the Panel in the areas of student learning by coursework programs such as graduate attributes; curriculum; student entry standards; teaching quality; plagiarism; student placement; assessment methods, standards and moderation; academic security and invigilation; student retention and progression; graduate destinations and employability.

2.1   *Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives*

UoB states that its graduate attributes (GAs) are aligned with the University Mission as well as the Program Objectives (POs) and Student Outcomes (SOs) (Portfolio, p.27). Each Program has Program Specifications that contain POs and SOs that students have to achieve at the completion of a program. The generic GAs that all graduates should have attained upon graduation are: "appropriate level of knowledge and skills in the discipline; analytic and critical thinking skills, professionalism, ethical behaviour and social responsibility; flexibility to adaptability to a multicultural and dynamic context" (UoB Graduate Attributes document). The Panel noted that the CoHS has its own GAs, these are: "professionalism, service orientation, discipline, amenability, and scholarship" (CoHS Program Specifications). UoB identified a list of four generic SOs for all programs with associated statements under each outcome i.e. knowledge and understanding skills, course-specific skills, thinking skills, and general and transferable skills (UoB Graduate Attributes document). The Panel considered samples of course materials and found that there was explicit mapping of the generic GAs with POs and SOs, and these were well embedded in program specifications. The Panel was informed by senior management that

industry and employer surveys to review the achievement of GAs had been developed but were yet to be disseminated.

From interviews, the Panel noted that there was lack of awareness of generic GAs and SOs amongst the students, staff and stakeholders. The Panel concluded that UoB needs to involve and improve staff and student awareness of its GAs and SOs. The GAs have been developed for students continuing their studies to Bachelor level; the Panel found that there are no specific GAs for students that exit programs at Advanced Diploma and Diploma levels. Data suggests that a large number of students exited at Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels. The Panel urges UoB to ensure that the Diploma and Advanced Diploma exit points are structured to ensure that students graduate having met learning outcomes that support employment.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi increase awareness and understanding of graduate attributes among staff, students and stakeholders and develop appropriate graduate attributes for students exiting at the Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels.

UoB has program specifications for all programs and course outlines for all courses. Program specifications of the Mechanical Engineering program and the Architectural Engineering program vary in that in some places UoB states that the objectives in the POs are to be attained by the alumni three to four years after graduation and in other places they are to be achieved two to three years after graduation, while Information and Communication Engineering requires students to achieve POs three to four years after graduation. The Panel was unclear as to the rationale of how graduates can attain POs after their period of study in UoB. In addition, the Panel could not find evidence of checkpoints to ensure that graduates are meeting the POs during their study on the program. The Panel urges UoB to review consistency across program specifications in order to ensure that POs and SOs can be attained during the students' period of study on the program and not afterwards.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi ensure consistency in the program specifications and ensure all graduates achieve Program Objectives and Students Outcomes by the end of their period of study on the program.

As part of its curriculum review, UoB intends to carry the first cycle of review for both the POs and SOs in Spring Semester during the academic year 2015-2016 through pilot assessments that will be carried out by designated Colleges (Portfolio, p.28). The CoE will review the POs of the Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering program using alumni and employer surveys, which were designed during the Fall semester during the academic year 2015-2016, while the CoB will carry out a review of SOs of the Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems through the review of course objectives which are mapped to the SOs. Both Colleges will run a pilot assessment of the designated outcomes as a preparation step to the systematic implementation of such assessments (Portfolio p.28). The Panel supports UoB in its effort to review the POs and SOs.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that the University of Buraimi needs to review its Program Objectives and Student Outcomes and supports its efforts to address this by implementing pilot reviews in the College of Engineering and the College of Business.

2.2   Curriculum

UoB offers 11 degree programs namely: Civil Engineering; Architectural Engineering, Information and Communication Engineering; Mechanical Engineering; Optometry; Nursing; Management Information Systems; Business Administration; and E-Business Management,; Export Oriented Management; and Islamic Finance and Banking. All programs have been licensed by the MoHE (Portfolio, p.29).

The development of these programs was based on market analysis and benchmarking against comparable programs in Oman and elsewhere. Each College has a Curriculum Committee responsible for obtaining data and preparing the requirements for program offerings. UoB states that for programs recently introduced, a systematic approach to benchmarking of the curriculum has been used (Portfolio, p.29). The Panel considered the benchmarking process and report of the Management Information Systems Program and suggests that it could be disseminated across all UoB programs.

In 2014-2015, UoB established a Curriculum, Program and Course review and a Development Process Policy, to ensure a systematic process to curriculum design which would involve the College Board, the College Advisory Board and the University Academic Council (Portfolio, p.30). According to the UoB, this policy is due to take effect in Spring Semester academic year 2015-2016 but had not been implemented by the time of the Audit Visit. However, the Panel noted that the College Advisory Boards have yet to be established (see Recommendation 13). The Panel encourages UoB to expedite establishment of these Boards in order to support implementation of its curriculum, program and course review (see Section 5.2).

UoB states that the Dean of each College and the Director of CFS shall review curricula once every five years; however, "based on external and regulatory requirements, such curriculum review may be carried out before the completion of five years" (UoB curriculum review document). Although the curriculum review process is stated clearly in the policy, the curriculum development lacks input from external stakeholders and industry, as reported by staff and stakeholders who were interviewed. The Panel urges UoB to implement a systematic approach to curriculum review that incorporates external input.

> **Recommendation 13**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi implement its curriculum, program and course review policy and establish its College Advisory Boards in order to facilitate external input into the development and review of the curriculum.**

2.3   Student Entry Standards

UoB states that it has clearly defined admission policies and procedures for its undergraduate programs and that a student should have a minimum overall score of "C" or an equivalent in the Diploma of General Education (DGE) in order to be admitted to undergraduate programs (Portfolio, p.31). However, the Panel noted that this criterion is not consistent with the UoB admission criteria specified in Student Handbook of the MoHE Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC); CoB and CoE require a student to have a pass grade in DGE.

Students are admitted either directly to UoB undergraduate programs or to the General Foundation Program (GFP), which adopts the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Program (Portfolio, p.31). Students are placed in the GFP if they are not able to meet the required entry level score for English, Mathematics or IT. The GFP is a bridging program for the undergraduate degrees that aims to develop the basic competencies required for the undergraduate admission and for subsequent student success in the academic programs (Portfolio, p.32). The majority of students (90%) admitted in academic year 2015-2016 were placed in the English

component of the GFP, around 5% were placed in Mathematics and IT components, and 5% of the students were directly admitted to undergraduate programs. During interviews, academic staff expressed their satisfaction with students' entry level to the undergraduate programs. However, the Panel found no evidence that entry standards to the different Bachelor programs have been evaluated or reviewed. The Panel urges UoB to monitor and evaluate its entry standards and be consistent in communicating information regarding entry standards to its stakeholders.

> **Recommendation 14**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi ensure entry standards are consistently communicated to stakeholders and ensure that the entry standards are regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure effectiveness.**

2.4   *Teaching Quality*

UoB's goal is to engage in academic initiatives that encourage student-centered and life-long learning, primarily focus on learning processes, which is in alignment with the "Inspired Learning" concept indicated in the University's Vision statement, as well as the "learner-centered experience" highlighted in the Mission statement (Portfolio, p.35).   UoB states that faculty members use a range of teaching methods such as lectures, classroom discussion, case studies, group work, and presentations. The mode of teaching is primarily face-to-face and uses the online facility, SharePoint, to provide supplementary learning materials (Portfolio, p.35).   The Panel found that SharePoint was valued by those students who were interviewed. UoB conducts teaching and learning training sessions for staff.   Teaching staff also compile Course Portfolios through the Student Information System (SIS) that enable Deans to suggest improvement for the course (Portfolio, p35). The Panel acknowledges UoB's efforts in this area (see Section 6.2).

The Panel found clear evidence from the interviews and supporting materials to suggest that there is a systematic approach to data collection on the quality of teaching across all Colleges. Students complete online students' Teacher Evaluation Forms, the feedback from which is used to inform Faculty Performance Evaluation along with classroom observation (Portfolio, p.37). During interviews, the Panel learned of some instances of improvements to teaching practice such as improving teaching materials, changing textbooks based on students' feedback and organising faculty development programs and faculty colloquia to address and discuss issues relevant to teaching and learning based on identified needs and feedback. The Panel was pleased to see that UoB has a robust system of monitoring courses and teaching effectiveness using on-line student evaluations, classroom observation and peer evaluations and takes action in response to student feedback.

The Panel learnt that the results of students' evaluation of teaching can be viewed by the faculty member after the student grades are finalized and officially approved. During interviews, faculty members stated that they do not always have access to their own results although the results are discussed with them by their Dean on an individual basis during staff appraisals. The Panel was also informed that the students are not made aware of the results of on-line student evaluation of teaching. UoB is encouraged to share with students the changes made in response to their feedback. The Panel viewed the aggregate results of the student evaluation via Student Information System (SIS) and found potential for benefits to be gained from the dissemination of aggregated results. The Panel suggests that UoB share evaluation results and close the feedback loop with students and staff to facilitate internal benchmarking and accountability to students for the information they provide.

UoB states that it has developed a new staff workload policy based on variation as per the academic staff rank to ensure that faculty members have a balanced load that allows them to dedicate adequate time for student consultation, course material preparation, assessment

preparation, teaching, learning innovation, research and community engagement (Portfolio, p.36). During staff interviews, the Panel was informed that according to this policy, faculty members are allotted contact hours in terms of the number of credits in the course. On an average teaching staff have a teaching load of 16-18 credit hours. This has meant that some teaching staff have heavy teaching loads (about 24 contact hours per week) which has resulted in insufficient time available for student consultation, research activities and community service in addition to committee work. CoHS staff, who are involved in laboratory and clinical teaching, accompany students to hospitals outside Buraimi area. The staff workload policy needs to reflect these variations (see Section 1.2). The Panel was also informed that stakeholders were not consulted about this policy before it was implemented.

Senior management stated that the workload policy document is an overarching one to make sure that teaching staff across all Colleges have the same number of credit hours however, this has not resulted in an equal teaching load as the number of teaching hours was high for some staff. The Panel noted UoB's efforts to record and monitor teaching load across the University and urges the University to reflect the variations in the workload across all programs to allow the faculty to support students outside the classroom and to engage in other professional development and research activities.

> **Recommendation 15**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi review its teaching load policy to reflect the variations in staff workload across its programs and to support the achievement of teaching, learning, research and community engagement goals.**

2.5   *Plagiarism*

One of UoB's core Values is integrity, which is guided by principles of honesty and manifested in its efforts to deter plagiarism (Portfolio, p.38). UoB has a well-defined plagiarism policy that has information on avoiding, detecting and monitoring of plagiarism as well as investigating cases of plagiarism and the penalties involved. The Student Guide also has information on forms of plagiarism and penalties, and course syllabuses include a clear statement regarding anti-plagiarism rules. The Colleges have manuals for undergraduate research projects/theses, which clearly explain the process and importance of in-text citation and referencing. During interviews, the Panel found that students were aware of the plagiarism policy, forms of plagiarism, and consequences of plagiarism and students stated that they were repeatedly informed about them by the teaching staff which was confirmed by staff who were interviewed.

However, the Panel found evidence of undetected student plagiarism in assignments and project/theses in samples of students' work submitted in the supporting materials; a significant amount of information was copied exactly from the internet. It was also noted that some students failed to include in-text citation, referencing of figures and submitted an incomplete reference list. Instances of plagiarism had not been detected either by respective teaching staff or by the moderator; in addition, students were awarded more than 90% of the allocated marks (see Section 2.7). UoB's approach to detecting plagiarism was inconsistent across the Colleges. For example, samples of students' assignments from the CoHS showed correct in-text citation, appropriate referencing and authentic work. The Panel suggests the good practice of CoHS to be disseminated to the other Colleges.

UoB states that faculty members are generally responsible for producing their own course materials, with adequate reference to the used sources (Portfolio, p.50). However the Panel found evidence of unreferenced text in the program specifications and in course outlines as well as teaching materials such as PowerPoint slides with no references.

Following consideration of the sample materials UoB provided, the Panel has serious concerns about the lack of academic integrity within the University and whether the systems for maintaining rigor to ensure that students are meeting POs based on their own work are being upheld. Failure by UoB to properly attend to issues of plagiarism and lack of academic integrity undermines the maintenance of academic standards and, therefore, the Panel urges the University to give urgent attention to these issues. UoB needs to develop and implement systems to create a culture which supports staff and students in avoiding plagiarism to ensure that academic standards are being upheld. The Panel also urges UoB to ensure that staff and students across all Colleges are familiar with procedures for detecting, handling and documenting cases of plagiarism to ensure consistent implementation of its plagiarism policy.

> **Recommendation 16**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends, as a matter of urgency, that the University of Buraimi significantly strengthen its support for the maintenance of academic standards by developing and implementing systems to ensure that academic integrity is respected and upheld by all staff and students.**

2.6   *Student Placements*

UoB states that the final requirement for all students at the University is an internship course or equivalent and that there is an internship, alumni and career service unit to support internship and placement and conduct appropriate activities for career development and tracking graduates' employment and achievement (Portfolio, p.39), although the Panel found that this unit is not yet operational. UoB is urged to establish this unit to support its activities in this area (see Recommendation 31).

Each College has a set of internship guidelines and evaluation mechanisms (Portfolio, p.39) and internship opportunities are provided to the students through the respective Colleges. The Panel heard positive comments about students' skills from industry stakeholders although they felt that a few students were not committed. Samples of internship evaluation by training providers were submitted but comments were found to be generic in nature and lacked appropriate feedback that could lead to improvement. The Panel suggests that UoB develop systems to ensure that feedback received is constructive and informs improvement.

The CoHS has established relationships with health care institutions in the Governorates of Buraimi, North Batinah and Muscat that play a key role in providing practical experience to students of the Nursing and Optometry programs. The Nursing students attended their internship in Buraimi Hospital while Optometry students had international exposure to clinical skills at the Center for Sight in India. Positive feedback was heard from both national and international internship providers and reflection on this experience had led to an improvement in the Student Outcomes. The Panel was pleased to hear about the establishment of links both at national and international levels for CoHS student placement which provided students with practical training opportunities to help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

> **Commendation 1**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the University of Buraimi for providing practical training to students by establishing links nationally and overseas for internship placements for students in the College of Health Sciences that had positive impact on their learning experience.**

2.7   Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation

UoB uses a variety of assessment methods such as "class participation which may include a combination of seatwork, case studies, homework, presentations, laboratory/practical exercises, and student projects; Midterm Exam, and Final Exam" (Portfolio, p.41). UoB also states that it strives to ensure accuracy and transparency of the assessment process by conducting post-exam moderation and providing timely feedback to the students in an appropriate manner (Portfolio, p.42). There was evidence of internal moderation activity at the CoHS where analysis of assessment practices, students' grades, exams and moderation processes were conducted to identify areas for improvement and the Panel suggests that these practices be shared with other Colleges.

Samples of students' assignments from a range of levels were considered and it was found that the tasks lacked the depth needed to judge the actual level of students' achievement. The Panel suggests that this is an area to be urgently addressed and urges UoB to develop a system that ensures the alignment of assessments with the learning outcomes. In the samples of assessments, there was no written feedback and that UoB is encouraged to review its approach to providing feedback to students (see Section 2.5).

UoB states that its "assessment methods design and related processes in moderation, feedback and efficiency measurement assure that UoB is adequately evaluating the student outcome achievement with accuracy, transparency and continual improvement" (Portfolio, p.42). UoB also states that it intends to implement exam committee moderation and feedback, and external reviewer feedback as a post-exam mechanism starting in academic year 2016-2017 (Portfolio, p.42). However the Panel did not find further evidence of mechanisms to support this claim and urges UoB to develop and implement a comprehensive and consistent assessment policy and procedures that ensure alignment of assessments with the learning outcomes and include external moderation across all Colleges.

> **Recommendation 17**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a comprehensive assessment policy and procedures that include external moderation to validate assessment processes and to ensure assessments are aligned with intended Student Outcomes.**

2.8   Academic Security and Invigilation

The University has a set of procedures to maintain the integrity of student assessments and each College implements various mechanisms with regard to assessment security and invigilation (Portfolio, p.42). The Panel heard during interviews with faculty members that the course teacher, course coordinator, peer reviewer, and the Dean all have access to examination papers throughout the stages of development, moderation and securing of exam papers. The Panel was not able to find evidence of a system to ensure the security of soft and hard copies of exam papers and has serious concerns about the security of exam papers. The University is urged to take measures to ensure the integrity of all assessment procedures.

There is an invigilation mechanism is in place, where an adequate number of invigilators is assigned during the examinations and a ratio of one invigilator to 20-25 students is maintained (Portfolio, p.43). UoB Exam Code of Conduct provides details of the behavior expected of students during the examination and the mechanism for handling potential cases of cheating or misconduct during the examination. The Panel heard from a number of staff who were interviewed that they are vigilant, and maintain zero tolerance for cheating. The University statistics record on cheating revealed that there has been a decline in the number of cheating cases

across all Colleges and CFS which dropped to zero in 2015-2016. The Panel urges the University to explore additional measures to identify and avoid student misconduct during examinations.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi establish a mechanism for securing exam papers and monitor the effective and consistent implementation of the Exam Code of Conduct.

2.9 *Student Retention and Progression*

UoB conducts periodic student retention and progression analysis at the end of each academic year to determine appropriate actions for students (Portfolio, p.44). The retention and progression data presented by the University was not easy for the Panel to interpret and there were variations in the data submitted (see Section 7.2). The Panel learnt that some programs have more than one exit point and it was not clear as to how this was considered in the retention and progression calculations. UoB affirms that its progression rate for the batch/cohort academic year 2010-2011 meets academically expected performance and is higher than satisfactory considering the young age of the University (Portfolio, p.46). The Panel, however, did not find evidence of this. UoB is urged to review its data management system to ensure the accuracy of its data and that the data is used to inform program reviews.

UoB also states that it is reassured that its admission criteria, curriculum structure, the delivery mode, academic support and resources support student progression (Portfolio, p.46). The Panel did not find any evidence of evaluation or analysis to support this. To illustrate, additional evidence submitted by UoB showed that 19 students graduated at Bachelor level out of 85 students who were enrolled in the Business Administration Program in academic year 2010-2011, 22 graduated out of 202 enrolled in 2011-2012, three graduated out of 80 enrolled in 2012-2013. Statistics of other programs showed a similar trend; for example, in the Nursing program, 31 students graduated out of 101 students enrolled in 2010-2011, three students graduated out of 114 students enrolled in 2011-2012. Again, statistics for the Civil Engineering programs showed that 17 students graduated out of the 27 students enrolled in 2010-2011, nine graduated out of 60 students enrolled in 2011-2012 and four graduated out of 52 students enrolled in 2012-2013. It is not clear from the data what UoB means by "graduates" (i.e. whether students are graduating at Diploma, Advanced Diploma or Bachelor level). UoB needs to make explicit definition of data measurement processes to help make informed decisions and take appropriate corrective measures.

Recommendation 19

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that UoB review its data management system to ensure the accuracy of data and critically analyse its progression and retention data to help make informed decisions.

Based on the above statistics, it was concluded that progression rate from the admission stage to graduation of a given students batch/cohort is low. The Panel urges UoB to develop strategies to monitor and improve its progression and retention rates to increase the proportion of Bachelor degree graduates in order to realize its University status classification.

Recommendation 20

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement strategies to increase the proportion of Bachelor degree graduates in order to meet the expectations of a fully-fledged university.

2.10   Graduate Destinations and Employability

UoB states that the total number of graduates at the time of the audit was 71 and that 82% of these students graduated in academic year 2014-2015 so it has not been able to collect significant alumni data within the short period since their graduation. UoB intends to collect alumni data two to three years after graduation (Portfolio, p.47) although, in the Panel's view, UoB is in a position to start collecting data on graduation destinations and employability once graduates have left the University. The Panel concluded that this area requires focused attention and urges UoB to develop a robust system to track graduate destination and employability.

> **Recommendation 21**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop a robust system to track graduate destinations and employability to inform future improvements in the design and delivery of its programs.**

During interviews with UoB graduates and their employers, the Panel learned that the graduates of the Nursing program have to pass the Nursing National Licensing Exam conducted by the Ministry of Health as a requirement for employment in the Ministry of Health institutions. Alumni of CoHS confirmed that the College helped them in the preparation of this exam. There were positive views from employers of graduates from CoHS that students were generally prepared for their positions. However, employers indicated that the students required more clinical training and needed to improve communication skills with clients. The Panel suggests that UoB review its systems to get constructive feedback from employers to inform the design and delivery of its programs (see Section 2.6).

3   STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

UoB states that this section is not applicable to the University because it does not currently have PhD, Masters by research or Honours programs.

The main characteristics of a University as stated in ROSQA are:
- Offers accredited programmes up to and including the masters and or doctoral level;
- Conducts undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in faculties representing at least three broad fields of learning.

The Panel encourages the University establish a plan for the growth of student learning by research in order to fulfill the requirements of ROSQA and meet the criteria for the definition of "University" (see Recommendation 1).

4   STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

UoB's Mission states "Progress oriented education, research and engagement that contribute to quality of life, and learner centred experience" (Portfolio, p.11). UoB indicates that its revised organisational structure includes a Research and Post Graduate Deanship with Research Innovation Department, which shows its clear intention to strengthen its research capabilities (Portfolio, p.47).

The Requirements of Oman Standards for Quality Assurance (ROSQA) include an institutional classification that requires Universities to follow a substantial engagement in research. The Panel heard two different views from the senior management: one, that seven to ten years are required for the University to become research active, the other that five years are required. However, academic staff gave positive views about research.

4.1   *Research Planning and Management*

UoB's strategic goal with regard to research is to promote research that serves the needs of the society and address strategic issues; the task of developing a research framework that strengthens its research capabilities has been assigned to a faculty member (Portfolio, pp.47-48). At the time of the Audit Visit, a faculty member had been recently nominated as Acting Department Chair of Research and Innovation Department and is undertaking this role in cooperation with the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs. The Research and Post Graduate Deanship with Research Innovation Department has not yet been established and all key functions within the Deanship are currently   vacant   positions.   The   Panel   urges   UoB   to   activate   this   department (see Recommendation 31).

The Requirements of Oman Standards for Quality Assurance (ROSQA) include an institutional classification that requires Universities to follow a substantial engagement in research. UoB does not currently meet the institutional classification as defined in ROSQA. The Panel was informed that the research framework will take into consideration the research priorities in the Oman 2020 Vision, consultation with external entities, such as SQU, and input from the University`s academic staff to promote research awareness within the University but that the framework is not yet complete. Present research activities are mainly limited to the publication of papers by academic staff. The College of Health Sciences has included research as one of its goals within its action plan. While the Panel supports this, it was not able to identify a comprehensive institutional approach to research planning and management. To support the culture of research in line with the expectations of a University, the Panel expects UoB to complete the development of its research framework in order to provide an overarching institutional approach to its research planning and management and urges UoB to expedite its implementation.

> **Recommendation 22**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi complete the development of its research framework in order to provide an overarching approach to research planning; management; and funding.**

4.2   *Research Performance*

UoB supports faculty research through its Conference Participation Policy and Consultancy Policy and a number of faculty research papers have been published (Portfolio, p.48). While the Panel was able to identify publications and conference participation by faculty, faculty were found to have a high teaching load combined with expected engagement in at least two

committees leading to limitations in research commitment. The Panel suggests that UoB develop systems to set targets and monitor research performance as part of its Research Framework (see Recommendation 22).

4.3   Research Funding Schemes

UoB states that considering the development stage and young age of the University, there is no research funding scheme and currently allocates research funding at College levels if requested (Portfolio, p.49). The Panel heard that the University is in the process of identifying available funding opportunities through Oman research entities such as The Research Council (TRC). UoB needs to give priority to this area, in line with its institutional classification as defined in ROSQA, its research framework and also to find other sources of funding for research (see Recommendation 22).

4.4   Consultancy Activities

The University has a Consultancy Policy that focuses on research linked consultancy, professional services and continuing education activities and programs (Portfolio, p.49). UoB's consultancy activity is in its infancy and hence no meaningful analysis can be presented as the Research Directorate Deanship, Community Service and Continuing Education Deanship and their related departments are not functioning (Portfolio, p.50). The Panel sighted one consultancy project contract signed in 2015 between the College of Engineering and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture. Other consultancy activities in which the University has been engaged are related to community service and training, such as conducting workshops and English language classes (Portfolio, p.49). The Panel encourages UoB's efforts in its consultancy activities and suggests aligning all activities under its comprehensive research framework (see Recommendation 22).

4.5   Ethics and Biosafety

UoB states that this section does not apply to its current status (Portfolio, p.51). However, as integrity is one of UoB's core Values and faculty research, student projects are amongst the University's academic activities, ethical standards in research are applicable to all members of the University. The University does address research ethics to a certain extent in its Human Resources Affairs (HRA) Bylaws and Code of Conduct Policy. The Panel concluded that awareness on the requirements of this area needs to be improved.

Biosafety is currently of minor concern for UoB as no research activities with hazardous biological substances are being conducted. The Panel suggests that UoB address ethics and biosafety within its comprehensive research framework (see Recommendation 22).

4.6   Intellectual Property

UoB is building awareness on the intellectual property and the anti-plagiarism culture and is in the process of developing a policy (Portfolio, p.50). The Panel advises UoB to accelerate the process of development and implementation of this policy (see Section 2.5).

4.7   Professional Development for Research

UoB has a Conference Participation Policy and Deans are advised to include budgets for conference participation, faculty training and workshops and any other faculty development related activities, particularly on research, in their annual College budget (Portfolio, p.51). The Panel supports UoB in encouraging faculty in their professional development. However, the Panel was informed that the Conference Participation Policy allows only PhD holders to apply for conference participation and was disconcerted to find that Master Degree holders are not entitled

to apply for conference participation. In order to develop a research culture, UoB is urged to provide equal opportunities for all faculty members to support professional development for research.

> **Recommendation 23**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi provide equal opportunities to all staff for their professional development for research opportunities and to align these with the research framework in order to support the University's aspirations in research.**

4.7   *Research Commercialisation*

UoB states that this section does not yet apply to its activities (Portfolio, p.51). The fifth Institutional Goal of the Strategic Plan states that the University aims to "create new knowledge and become a national repository of expertise" (UoB Strategic Plan document). As the University develops its research profile, it will need to consider its approach to this area.

4.8   *Research – Teaching Nexus*

UoB recognises the importance of the research-teaching nexus as evidenced in its first goal of the Strategic Plan which aims at "support(ing) faculty-student collaborative research and act on outcomes of such research e.g., recognition, reward, publications, and publicity" (UoB Strategic Plan document). The Panel found that at the time of the audit, the research-teaching nexus at the University was not developed and it was informed that UoB will be able to pursue this goal once the research framework has been developed. UoB is encouraged to put in place policies, procedures, and protocols that promote and encourage faculty to link their research to teaching within its research framework (see Recommendation 22).

5   INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

UoB has identified industry and community engagement as a goal in its Strategic Plan, "'to engage with the industry and community to establish initiatives for common good'". The Strategic Plan has yearly action plans that are associated with the above goal and strategies; UoB's revised organisational structure has a Community Service and Continuing Education Centre for planning and developing relationships with the local community by the end of the academic year 2016-2017.

This Chapter focuses on industry and community engagement planning and management; relationships with industry and employers; relationship with professions; other education providers; alumni; and the community at large.

5.1   *Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management*

The Industry and Community Engagement (ICE) Committee has been tasked to develop University's links with industry and community (Portfolio, p.52). The Community Service and Continuing Education Centre shown in the revised organisational structure is yet to established and UoB is urged to activate this Centre (see Recommendation 31).

ICE, in coordination with the Colleges, has developed an action plan for community engagement activities along with a budget. The Colleges have engaged in a range of activities with the community such as a Food Safety and Hygiene workshop, World Aids Day and Awareness campaign. However, the Panel did not find any measurable KPIs associated either with the goal or the action plans and it is not clear how the University will measure the achievement of the strategic goal specific to this area of activity. The Panel concluded that UoB needs to monitor and evaluate ICE activities in line with its stated action plan.

5.2   *Relationships with Industry and Employers*

In order to encourage faculty members and Colleges to engage in industrial activities and to target the needs of the industries and employers, UoB has prepared a Consultancy Policy, which resulted in a consultancy project with the Ministry of Heritage (Portfolio, p.54). In order to get feedback from external stakeholders, the revised organisational structure includes for each College a College Advisory Board (CAB) where members from relevant industry and professional bodies are included (Portfolio, p.54). Though the Panel supports UoB in recognising the need to form these Boards, it was found that the proposed CAB composition consisted of lists of nominated members for potential boards and the CABs have yet to be established (see Section 2.2). The Panel was informed that an employer survey has been developed and it is due to be piloted for the CoE during the academic year 2015-2016 although there was no data available to the Panel on the results of piloting. While UoB's intention to have a systematic mechanism to get industry and employer feedback on their input into the curricula and program development is encouraged, these systems are yet to be developed. The Panel urges UoB to make progress in this area.

> **Recommendation 24**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi establish the College Advisory Boards in order to develop formal relationships with industry and employers and ensure that the relationship is effectively monitored and evaluated.**

5.3   Relationships with Professions

UoB promotes building relationships with professional bodies and encourages the faculty and students to interact with them through conferences, faculty membership, and reference points for benchmarking (Portfolio, p.55). Evidence of activities to promote relationships with professional bodies was submitted, for example, the University has been recognized as a resource center of the International Association of Contact Lens Educators and has received learning resources from the association. The CoE has conducted a course on Construction and Supervision management to the Oman Society of Engineers. UoB was a bronze sponsor of the Oman Ophthalmic Society's International Conference in the academic year 2013-2014, in which students and faculty members of the CoHS participated and the College Dean presented a paper. While evidence of current partnerships with various professions show that UoB is active in this area, the Panel concluded that UoB needs to have a systematic approach to building relationships with professions and to monitor and evaluate these activities to ensure their effectiveness.

5.4   Relationships with Other Education Providers

The University has initiated and implemented partnerships with education providers though it is considering a more systematic and planned approach (Portfolio, p.54). UoB has signed Memoranda of Understanding with international education providers Center for Sight in India, to provide internship training for Optometry students; and Stratford University, USA, to promote cooperation in the fields of teaching, research and in further development. Staff members from UoB also visited Sohar University and the German University of Technology to enhance their understanding of University structure and culture (Portfolio, p.56). The Panel supports UoB in its efforts to build relationships with national and international education providers.

> **Affirmation 3**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the University of Buraimi that it needs a systematic and planned approach to building relationships with other education providers and supports its efforts to develop a performance-oriented approach.**

5.5   Relationships with Alumni

UoB has 71 graduates, out of which 58 graduated in the academic year 2014-2015. It states that alumni data has to be collected two to three years after their graduation and it has plans to have a system in place by the time the number of graduates increases (Portfolio, p.56) (see Section 2.10). As stated earlier, UoB's revised organisational structure has a dedicated Internship, Alumni and Career Service Unit. This unit is yet to be established and there is very little evidence of its progress and UoB is urged to establish the unit and strengthen its relationship with alumni (see Recommendation 31).

The University plans to run a pilot Alumni Survey in Spring Semester of academic year 2015-16. The Panel found no evidence of alumni input into curriculum review and development to support the strategy to "develop curriculum and programs that utilise alumni and strategic partners while preparing the students for their career searches" (UoB Strategic Plan document). Alumni from CoHS informed the Panel that the College helped them in preparation for the Nursing National Licensing Exam conducted by Ministry of Health.   The CoHS regularly contacts some of the students and students have provided written feedback about their experiences at the College via a questionnaire sent to them. The Panel concluded, however, that at the time of the Audit Visit, the University had no formal contact mechanism with its alumni and that most of the efforts of UoB are still at the planning stage. UoB is urged to develop an effective system to activate and monitor its relationship with alumni.

Recommendation 25

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi establish relationships with its alumni and develop and implement an effective system to activate and monitor the relationship; build an alumni profile; and conduct alumni surveys to inform and improve the curriculum and student learning experience.

5.6   *Relationships with the Community at Large*

UoB's strategic goal for its relationship with community states that: "enhance the engagement with local community and professional organisations". UoB envisages that the new campus will enhance the capacity of the University to host public events for both the local and regional communities (Portfolio, p.57). UoB provides support to the public such as conducting a 48-hour Level One English training program for 15 participants in coordination with the Chamber of Commerce. The Panel heard positive feedback on the "Beautification of Al Buraimi" project, fully sponsored by the University. The Panel supports UoB's efforts in its engagement with the community and encourages the University to implement a more systematic approach to planning; implementing and evaluating community engagement activities.

6   ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

UoB states that one of its strategic goals is to encourage and support activities that transform students into global citizens (Portfolio, p.58). UoB's organizational chart shows that the departments under academic support services report to Dean of Student Affairs.

This Chapter presents the Panel's findings on planning and management of academic support services; registry; the library; information and learning technology services; academic advising; student learning support; and teaching resources.

6.1   *Academic Support Services Planning & Management*

According to UoB's organisational chart for institutional management, the responsibility for academic support services lies with four different administrative departments: the Student Affairs Department, the Admission and Registration Department, the Learning Resource Center, and the Student Engagement and Academic Advertisement Centre (SEAAC). These departments report to the Dean of Student Affairs although the Dean of Student Affairs is yet to be appointed. The institution is urged to fill the Dean of Student Affairs position to ensure stability in planning and operation for the department (see Recommendation 31). Each department, under the supervision of a Head of Department (HoD), is responsible for developing its Operational Plan and reporting on achievements. UoB states that "the Colleges, along with their committees such as the Student Graduate Committee and Teaching and Learning and Enhancement, Novelty, and Transformation (TaLENT) Committee among others provide support ranging from academic advising to student internship and preparation for employment" (Portfolio, p.58). The planning and management function of the academic support services is monitored by the heads for each College and department. While the Panel confirmed the existence of annual action plans, UoB is advised to develop action plans that can be measured using performance indicators in order to assess the effectiveness of its academic support services.

There was evidence of students evaluating the services provided by the SEAAC through an annual satisfaction survey in the fall semester of Academic Year 2015-2016. However, the student response rate was very low (n=6 to 8). The Panel encourages UoB to engage in efforts to increase the student participation rate in future surveys and to develop robust systems that ensure effective student participation in providing feedback that can inform improvements.

6.2   *Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

UoB states that it "has an efficient functional Student Information System (SIS) having modules for students, faculty and administrators" (Portfolio, p.59). The University's student matriculation and course enrollment is administered online through an in-house developed SIS via an Oracle DB platform and Java design tools. The SIS was developed over the past three years by a dedicated programmer in response to institutional requests for a campus-wide system that meets the operational needs of the University. The SIS programmer and manager reports directly to the Vice Chancellor and works in collaboration with IT staff to ensure the availability of the necessary hardware and software to maintain and expand the operational functions of the SIS. The SIS offers three log-in modules dedicated to students, instructors, and administrators. The student module handles all course enrollment transactions, class schedule, transcript requests, curriculum and graduation information, course grades, academic adviser details, course evaluation, and class attendance records. The instructor module includes the courses taught (to be taught), the class roster, student grades, test scores, and advising and attendance notes. The administrator modules includes academic program and curriculum information, classroom and laboratory information, class schedules, student admission data, student attendance and grade control information, and student finance and fee information. In addition, the administrator

module offers a list of predefined reports covering admissions, class scheduling, student enrollment, student graduation, grade distribution, room/lab utilisation, and student outcomes (e.g., retention rates, CGPA statistics, graduation rates). The system also provides a messaging prompt service to alert students and faculty about pertinent issues (e.g. academic performance alerts). Layered access provides entry to SIS on the basis of authorised need as governed by an official access matrix, as documented in the submitted supporting material. Data are backed up daily on site.

The Panel heard positive feedback in its interviews with staff, instructors, and students on the operational and functional value of the SIS and concluded that the University has developed and implemented a system that is tailored to the needs of all its stakeholders, and that handles a wide range of important data to support the effective operation of the University.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the University of Buraimi for having developed a Student Information System that is highly functional and effectively supports the varied needs of its constituents.

As the SIS was developed in-house by one individual from the ground up, with little or no programming assistance from other personnel, the Panel urges the institution to establish sufficient staff to support this system. This action should ensure that the current SIS can be safely maintained (if not expanded) should the current architect/program developer of the system not be available to the institution. The Panel is of the view that student information systems are a critical component to ensure smooth operation of a University, and thus the institution should provide sufficient staff coverage should there be changes in responsible personnel.

Recommendation 26

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi ensure sufficient staffing arrangements to support the sustainable operation and management of the Student Information System.

6.3   *Library*

The Learning Resource Center (LRC) is responsible for the library resources (Portfolio, p.61); the library on the current campus holds about 9,000 books. The holdings are systematically catalogued, and acquisition is governed largely by a formal request process from the instructional departments to the Deans, with Deans submitting the requested list of books to the VC for approval. Once approved, the request is forwarded to the purchasing department to process the order. Students may also submit book requests, and some acquisitions may occur while attending book fairs. The library resources are complemented with online access to SharePoint, where teaching faculty store additional materials for retrieval by students. Student use of the SharePoint facility is monitored with an utilisation report that shows how often individual documents are accessed. The library itself offers access to 12 computer terminals and study space. To support use of its resources, the library conducts regular orientation sessions and alerts faculty and students of new acquisitions through bulletin boards.

The Panel found that the library was short staffed and was supervised by one person. At the time of the Audit Visit, the LRC in-charge has been recently nominated as Acting Director. The Panel urges UoB to appoint a permanent person to head up the library operation and to provide systematic professional development opportunities to staff (see Recommendation 31).

Staff and students informed the Panel that they were dissatisfied with the working hours of the library and lack of e-resources. UoB is encouraged to expand operating hours for the library past 4 p.m. to include evening hours, and to expand the library staff accordingly. Given the

importance of online access to internet-based educational resources, the Panel urges the University to establish access to online educational databases to support its academic programs, students and faculty research.

> **Recommendation 27**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi improve its library provision and establish adequate access to online educational databases in order to complement its book acquisition to support its academic programs, students and faculty research.**

The Panel had a guided tour of the new campus and noted that it offers considerably more space, and upgraded technology, to operate its buildings, compared to the old campus. The new location should address some of the identified opportunities for improvement associated with the old campus; specifically, students will have more physical space to access library resources in a central campus location.

6.4   *Information and Learning Technology Services*

The Information Technology (IT) resources are managed by the institution's IT Department which is responsible for technical support of the SIS, SharePoint, and computer software and hardware in teaching laboratories (Portfolio, p.62). The Panel found that students and staff seemed to be generally satisfied with all aspects of institutional IT provision. On-campus logon is typically via wireless connection based on 25 access points (hot spots, six computer labs, and 10 specialised labs). The institution also plans to add an SMS mass-mailing capability in Fall 2016 to enhance its communication channels. Although there is regular backup of data onsite across different servers, the institution is encouraged to consider offsite data backup as it moves to its new campus to increase data protection and retrieval in case of a total onsite power loss.

Whilst the Panel found the development of the SIS system impressive in its usability and access features (see Commendation 2), it was concerned that there is a single point of failure in relation to the maintenance of and updates to the SIS system. As mentioned in Section 6.3, the SIS has been developed by a single staff member of the University. The Panel did not find evidence of procedures or processes in place that would allow anyone other than this staff member to adequately maintain the system, or create fixes should the system fail. Given that the SIS is the main source of data management and reporting in the University, this risk needs to be mitigated immediately (see Recommendation 26).

6.5   *Academic Advising*

The academic advising function is carried out by dedicated advisers assigned by the Deans, and these assignments are tracked by the SIS. The academic advisers' primary roles are to assist students during registration, when appropriate; monitor student progression; and provide support to the academically challenged students (Portfolio, p.64). The central office for student academic support is the SEAAC, which works in conjunction with instructional faculty who determine the academic advising needs of their students. The monitoring of academic advising is managed in large part through dedicated documentation functions that are integral to the Student Information System (SIS). The Panel established through interviews that the academic advising process is effective, and that the institution has in place mechanisms to evaluate the advising process through the SEAAC (see Section 7.3). The Panel encourages the institution to use the student evaluation feedback as part of quality monitoring and improvement (see Section 6.1).

6.6   Student Learning Support

UoB's student learning support activities are conducted at University level through SEAAC and the Student Affairs Department, or individually within each College. UoB has mechanisms and processes to support learning across all University programs through various committees like At-risk and Warned Students Committee, Internship and Thesis Committee, and Teaching and Learning and Enhancement, Novelty, and Transformation (TaLENT) Committee. The Panel, through onsite interviews and supporting documentation, was able to confirm the varied activities the SEAAC offers to students in order to enhance the academic climate, culture of learning, and student awareness of institutional regulations governing academic conduct. The Panel was also pleased to see at an onsite demonstration of the SIS that students at academic risk due to low grades are flagged, alerted, and assigned extra instructional assistance. To ensure that the services offered through SEAAC and other academic support personnel are effective, the University is encouraged to routinely evaluate the quality of its support services.

During interviews, the Panel learned that the Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) provides remedial and tutorial classes for weak students who are identified from the placement test and this is extended for students who continue to face difficulty in their study because of their low level of English proficiency. In addition, the CFS offers English for Academic Purposes to the students of Business, Engineering and Health Sciences, to support the students' main study stream. The Panel supports and encourages the CFS to continue its efforts in identifying weak students and providing remedial and tutorial English classes to ensure that students have the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake undergraduate programs.

6.7   Teaching Resources

UoB states that it provides the necessary resources to ensure that teaching and learning is carried out according to its practices (Portfolio, p.65). Given the observations made during the guided tour of the new campus, the Panel is confident that identified limitations in certain areas of the current campus (e.g. laboratories, library) will be addressed with the move to the new campus. In particular, the Panel was impressed with the availability and design of the laboratory space on the new campus, as well as the technical standard of classrooms, office space, and common areas for students. The new campus infrastructure will become operational in several stages; thus the full potential associated with the new and improved facilities will not be realised for years to come. In the interim, institution is encouraged to carefully monitor the transition to the new campus, and address the opportunities for improvement identified in this Report, especially with respect to available library and online academic resources (see Section 6.3).

7   STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

UoB's institutional goal seven states that UoB aims "to support activities that transform students into responsible global citizens" through continuous improvement of the student experience related to curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities (Strategic Plan, p.38).

This Chapter includes the Panel's findings in relation to UoB students and student support services planning and management; student profile; student satisfaction and climate; student behaviour; career and employment services; student finances; accommodation, catering and transport; medical and counseling facilities; international student services; social and recreational services and facilities.

7.1   *Students and Student Support Services Planning & Management*

UoB states that the Student Affairs Department provides adequate support to students through direct interaction with students and through the Student Advisory Council or indirectly through SEAAC (Portfolio, p.68). The Panel found that while the position of Dean of Student Affairs in the organisational chart is yet to be filled, a Director of the Student Affairs Department has been appointed to strengthen this department (Portfolio, p.68). This position is not reflected in the organisational chart although the duties and responsibilities of the Director of the Student Affairs Department is mentioned in the HR Bylaws. UoB would benefit from developing a clear organisational chart that accurately reflects its operational activities (see Recommendation 31).

Responsibility for this area lies with the Student Affairs Department, Admissions and Registration Department, Student Engagement and Academic Advisement Centre (SEAAC) and Learning Resources Centre (LRC). These units prepare yearly action plans along with their budget requirements and submit them for approval (Portfolio, p.67). The Panel reviewed the Student Affairs and SEAAC action plans which demonstrate that these were in place for the Fall Semester academic year 2015-16, though action plans for previous semesters / years were not available. The Panel noted that some KPI measurements were not well aligned to the specified strategic goal and several focused only on completing discrete one-off procedural activities within the department. For example, in the SEAAC Accomplishment Report, the status for Goal seven reads: "There are 193 students came for general purpose, complaints, participations and suggestions and advising and counseling." The statement in the adjacent Strength column is "Increased the number of students who refer to SEAAC that is 193 comparing with last semester which is 116". The analysis does not make clear what proportion of the increased number of visits relate to complaints or participation.   Similarly, in the Administrative Affairs Accomplishment Report, the status, strengths, weaknesses and actions taken read "N/A" across a number of entries raising questions about the appropriateness of the KPIs. UoB is urged to consider these points in development of future departmental action plans to improve the accuracy and usefulness of the data for analysis, and the inclusion of feedback in the decision making process. The Panel concluded that UoB needs to develop a mechanism to systematically monitor and evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and level of satisfaction of its service provision.

> **Recommendation 28**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement mechanisms to systematically monitor and evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and level of student satisfaction of wide range of services to inform continuous improvement.**

7.2   Student Profile

As mentioned earlier, UoB has a customised Student Information System (SIS) which houses and maintains student records and data and from which various reports can be drawn such as student profile, tracking enrolment, financial aid status, College distribution, nationality, and transfer status (see Section 6.2). With regard to the student profile data on undergraduate students in the Colleges, the Panel noted some inconsistency and ambiguity in the data provided in the Portfolio. In one section of the Portfolio the total number of students enrolled in AY 2015-2016 is given as 3,108 (Portfolio, p.8) and in the table of number of students as 2,386 (Portfolio, p.93). The Panel confirmed that 3,108 represented the total number of student application received and it was confirmed that the total number of students actually registered on undergraduate programs in AY 2015-2016 was 2,188, with the largest number of students in the College of Business with 790, followed by the College of Health Sciences with 732, and the College of Engineering with 666 students. The statistical data shows that MoHE funded students currently account for 97% of new students registered in AY 2015-2016 and that the proportion of privately-funded new students has decreased considerably from 49% in AY 2010-2011 (97:197) to 2.5% in AY 2015-2016 (8:327).

UoB recognises that it is heavily dependent on MoHE sponsorship financially (Portfolio, p.68). During interviews, the Panel heard that the University is also aware of the challenges it faces with regard to the higher percentage of female students (more than 80%) compared to the male students and the constraints in attracting international /expatriate students. With its awareness of the imbalances and associated challenges, the Panel urges UoB to adopt a focused approach to diversify its revenue sources aimed at long-term financial stability (see Section 1.7). To do this successfully, UoB will need to ensure that the relevant stakeholders are consulted and that its student profile data is consistent, accurate and unambiguous (see Recommendation 19).

7.3   Student Satisfaction and Climate

The University has a Student Advisory Council (SAC) whose members are elected by student vote and the SAC works in liaison with Student Affairs Department and SEAAC (Portfolio, p.70). During interviews with students, the Panel was pleased to hear that students valued the approachability of SAC members and felt comfortable in the knowledge that they could seek advice and support on almost any matter. Students informed the Panel that they were in general satisfied with the support services provided with the exception of the catering facilities and particular aspects of student accommodation. Students spoke positively about their orientation and felt that the University met their expectations and that generally students were treated well.

SEAAC has developed a questionnaire for students using their services with respect to two aspects, namely, advising and counseling, and training and awareness. Eight students completed the questionnaire on advising and counseling and six students on training and awareness. The Panel found that the results of the survey showed that students were satisfied (see Section 6.5). While the Panel supports UoB's first step toward evaluating the student climate in these specific areas, the Panel found that the response rate was very low. The Panel recommends that UoB develop a robust system of seeking input on a more inclusive scale, extending across the range of services, facilities and activities on offer and utilise the feedback to demonstrate responsiveness to relevant issues leading to continuous improvements (see Recommendation 28).

7.4   Student Behaviour

UoB states that it has a clear rules regarding student behaviour. These are set out in the Student Behaviour Rules and Regulations available in Arabic and summarised in the Student Guide available in both English and Arabic and are explained to the students during orientation day and by the advisers (Portfolio, p.70). During interviews, the Panel heard from staff and students that all relevant information is normally provided to students during orientation although Student Behavior Rules and Regulations are currently available only in Arabic and hence the non-Arabic

speaking staff might not be able to explain these to students. UoB needs to develop a clear communication policy with regard to the language of communication to ensure all parties are appropriately informed, on regulatory matters in particular (see Recommendation 37).

The Panel also noted that the version of the Student Guide "2013 Draft and Work in Progress" submitted as supporting material was out of date. For example, the Student Guide says that UoB has different academic partnerships despite UoB having no academic partnerships. The Panel urges UoB to ensure that information given to students such as the Student Guide, student regulations and other relevant materials are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are accurate and current.

> **Recommendation 29**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi establish systems to ensure that students are provided with accurate and current information, such as the Student Guide, student regulations and other relevant materials, and that these are systematically checked, reviewed and updated regularly.**

7.5   *Career and Employment Services*

UoB's approved organisational structure includes a new Internship, Alumni and Career Services unit within the Student Affairs Department that is responsible for providing support in internship and placement and for conducting appropriate activities for career development in coordination with all UoB internal units and external stakeholders (Portfolio p.71). As this unit had not yet been activated, UoB is urged to take action in this area (see Recommendation 31).

The Panel found evidence of SEAAC's 2014-15 activities list which included several items such as CV writing, communication and time management skills among others. However, these activities do not seem to be the result of a planned approach. The Panel urges UoB to develop and implement a planned approach to its career and employment services.

> **Recommendation 30**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a planned approach to its career and employment services in order to support students in developing their job seeking skills and finding future employment.**

7.6   *Student Finances*

UoB provides financial aid to students facing financial difficulties. Applications for financial aid are reviewed by the Financial Aid Committee and decisions are made based on eligibility criteria set out under the Committee's duties and responsibilities (Portfolio, p.71). Evidence reviewed by the Panel showed that UoB provided financial support to 67 students in 2014-15. Students interviewed by the Panel were aware of the support on offer and how to apply and seemed satisfied with the service.

7.7   *Accommodation, Catering and Transport*

UoB provides accommodation for its students in six hostels. Students can register for rooms via an online reservation system (Portfolio, p.72). The University has Hostel Rules and Regulations in place and the Student Affairs Department carries out inspections of hostel accommodation twice a month to attend to maintenance issues and inspect the student behavior log. The Student

Affairs Department is in weekly communication with the hostel supervisors (Portfolio p.72). The Panel supports UoB in this practice.

UoB states that no major complaints were received about its accommodation, transport and catering services and hence believes that it is meeting students' needs (Portfolio, p.73). Interviews indicated that in general, students were satisfied with UoB's responsiveness to accommodation-related complaints. One exception was students' dissatisfaction with the quality and reliability of WiFi connectivity in the hostel accommodation; they reported that it was sometimes poor and at other times there was no signal at all.   The Panel heard that despite numerous complaints and reports being made, the issues had been ongoing for some time and remained unresolved. Students also raised the lack of a suitable study area as the accommodation was not furnished with desks. Hostel students also commented on the curfew rules and restrictions which they felt were unreasonable and overly strict. Students were also dissatisfied with the range, quality and freshness of food served in the cafeteria.

The Panel visited the new UoB campus site and were shown the designated area for the new hostel accommodation and restaurant where construction had commenced. Given that these facilities will not be available in time for the move, and that the current accommodation arrangements would remain in place in the interim, the Panel encourages UoB to prioritise a review of the quality of the current accommodation, catering and transport arrangements, including the extent to which its service providers are meeting the University's expectations in terms of quality and standard of service (see Recommendation 28).

7.8   *Medical and Counseling Facilities*

UoB has a Clinic that offers basic medical care for minor ailments which is guided by a set of rules clearly identifying its area of activities which includes rules for handling emergency cases (Portfolio, p.73). The Panel found that the on-campus Clinic is staffed by one qualified nurse who offers treatments for minor injuries and illnesses. Students who were interviewed by the Panel spoke positively about the University Clinic; although the Clinic was small, they expressed satisfaction with the ease of access and level of service provided. The Panel supports the University's initiatives to handle its medical facilities and encourages UoB to explore ways to provide counselling support to students and evaluate the effectiveness of its support services in this area.

7.9   *International Student Services*

In its Strategic Plan, UoB states that it aims to "establish support systems to ensure that international students are appropriately looked after and due facilities and services are provided and improved continuously" (Strategic Plan, p.34). UoB states that it does not have any international students and has a small number of expatriate students. The Human Resource Affairs Department assists these students in terms of visa and resident card processing (Portfolio, p.74). The Panel encourages UoB to develop and implement systems that ensure that it meets the needs of the international/expatriate students.

7.10   *Social and Recreational Services and Facilities*

UoB believes that extra-curricular activities, social and recreational activities are important components in the student educational process and provides them through the Student Affairs Department and through the respective Colleges (Portfolio, p.74). UoB runs a number of social and recreational activities and students informed the Panel that they were aware that clubs and activity groups existed in the University. Most of the students interviewed expressed an interest in being involved in extracurricular recreational activities, such as Arabic writing, poetry, arts and crafts, photography and sports. A few students mentioned that although they were aware of the activities, they were not encouraged to join. The Panel supports UoB's efforts and encourages the

University to ensure closer cooperation between Student Affairs Department and the Student Advisory Council in order to increase students' involvement in the planning of and participation in recreational activities.

8   STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

Respect and diversity are two core Values of the University of Buraimi through which it expresses dedication to being an equal opportunities employer and commitment "to creating a true multicultural environment where students, staff, and faculty represent diverse nations, countries and cultures within the context of national priorities" (Portfolio, p.11).

This Chapter considers the planning and management of human resources at UoB and reports on the Panel's findings in the following areas: staff profile; recruitment and selection; induction; professional development; performance planning review; promotion and other incentives; severance; staff organisational climate and retention; and Omanisation.

8.1   *Human Resources Planning & Management*

UoB Strategic goal three is "to invest in human and other resources that contribute to continued development". The Human Resource Affairs (HRA) Department is under the direction of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Financial and Administrative Affairs (DVC- FAA) and guided by the organisational structure, corporate governance and Human Resource Affairs Bylaws (Portfolio, p.76). The HRA Department consists of three units namely Staff Development, Personnel Affairs and General Relations Office /General Public Relations and is led by a HRA Director. The Staff Development Unit is currently unstaffed The UoB Faculty Handbook (Portfolio, p.76) offers comprehensive guidance for existing and new staff. However, having reviewed the handbook, the Panel encourages the University to update its contents to reflect the recent changes in policies, procedures and regulations.

With regard to the organisational structure, a very significant number of key positions within the University are vacant (as depicted in the operational organisational chart) or filled by acting heads. The Panel recognises the recruitment challenges the University is facing due to geographical constraints but it considers the filling of these positions imperative for the University to fulfill its Vision and Mission in particular in consideration of its future growth on a new campus. The Panel acknowledged the recent effort of the University to address this issue through a Relocation Policy which aims to reposition staff to positions that better fit their profile and identify staff for supervisory positions. However, the Panel urges UoB to develop and implement a Human Resource Plan that identifies a long term approach to the planning and recruitment of staff.

> **Recommendation 31**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a human resource plan that aligns with its strategic goal and ensure that all vacant positions in its organizational chart are filled.**

8.2   *Staff Profile*

UoB encourages recruitment of staff with diverse backgrounds in line with its value of diversity (Portfolio, p.76). At the time of the Audit Visit, the University had 200 staff. These included 129 faculty and 71 administrative staff with approximately 40% being female and 60% being male. With regard to gender distribution relating to academic as well as administrative staff, from 2012 to 2015 UoB has experienced an increase in the proportion of male staff (Portfolio, p.75). The University recognises the need to achieve a more balanced gender distribution and intends to recruit more Omani female staff as the University expands (Portfolio, p.77).

UoB states that it has staff from over 20 countries which reflects the University's commitment to creating a multicultural environment where students, staff, and faculty represent diverse nations, countries and cultures (Portfolio, p.4). In 2015 there were 63 administrative Omani staff members with an increase from 80% to 86% of Omani administrative staff between 2012 and 2015. With regard to Omani academic staff, although the total number of employees has increased from seven in 2012 to 14 in 2015, the overall percentage of academic Omani staff has decreased from 15% to 11%. UoB has introduced Teaching Assistant positions for Omani Bachelor degree holders pursuing Master's degrees to increase the percentage of Omani academic faculty (Portfolio, p.6). The Panel supports the University`s introduction of Teaching Assistant positions (see Section 8.10).

At the time of the Audit Visit, the University had the following overall distribution of academic staff: 37 PhD (32%) and 80 Masters (68%) degree holders, with 68% PhD holders in the College of Engineering, 55% PhD holders in the College of Business, 14% PhD holders in the College of Health Sciences and 5% PhD holders in the Centre for Foundation Studies. The Panel believes that the overall number of PhD holders is comparatively low in the College of Health Sciences. The Panel advises the University to strengthen its efforts to recruit more academic PhD qualified staff with the necessary skills to serve the teaching and learning needs of the students along with the ability to conduct research in line with the Strategic Plan and the requirements in ROSQA (see Recommendation 1).

8.3   Recruitment and Selection

The HRA Department receives notice of requirements for academic and administrative staff one semester before the start of each academic year which are then approved by the Vice Chancellor (Portfolio, p.77). Vacant positions are announced nationally and internationally through different media channels and, in the case of non-academic positions, also internally. Omani nationals qualified for the position are given priority. The Panel found that the recruitment policy documented in the HRA Bylaws differs from the recruitment practice described by UoB in the Portfolio and was not able to identify a systematic approach to determining profile and position requirements and reviewing the recruitment process. The Panel recommends that UoB review its recruitment policy for consistency in its policy and practices and evaluate its effectiveness to inform improvements.

> **Recommendation 32**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi review its staff recruitment process for effectiveness and, in light of findings, develop and implement a revised recruitment system which is supported by policies that are consistently implemented.**

8.4   Induction

The University states that it offers an extensive induction program for new academic staff to familiarise them with the University's academic and administrative systems, policies, regulations, procedures, resources and facilities (Portfolio, p.78). Although it was not clearly documented, the Panel heard the induction is conducted by the Human Resources Affairs Department. The formal induction is a two-day program covering information on the University in general and leading to a College-specific orientation. The Panel was informed that an evaluation of the orientation program is conducted via questionnaire which, however, is not anonymous. In interviews, academic staff provided positive feedback on their induction program. Administrative staff, on the other hand, did not seem to receive the same induction. The Panel concluded that UoB needs to develop a systematic approach for appropriate induction for academic and administrative staff and to evaluate its effectiveness.

8.5   Professional Development

The University's institutional goal three is "to invest in human and other resources that contribute to continual development" is derived from the Vision and Mission statements reflecting the commitment of UoB to the professional development of its employees (Portfolio, p.79). The University supports a wide range of professional development opportunities for academic and administrative staff, although these seem to be conducted on an ad hoc basis. The Panel received positive feedback from administrative staff on opportunities offered, such as, for example, an English language course.

Study leave for Omani employees is regulated in the HRA Bylaws and conference participation is regulated through a recently introduced policy. Otherwise the University relies on an ad hoc, peer-based, in-house based training approach. The Panel views professional development as an opportunity for the University to work towards fulfilling its Mission and accomplishing its institutional goal by systematically identifying, developing and implementing a professional development plan and UoB is therefore urged to develop a formal approach in this area.

> **Recommendation 33**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a comprehensive professional development plan for all staff which is aligned to the performance appraisal system.**

8.6   Performance Planning and Review

UoB conducts annual performance appraisal for both academic and administrative positions at all levels. The performance appraisal includes a self-appraisal and an immediate supervisor's appraisal (Portfolio, p.80). A comprehensive explanation of the criteria of the appraisal system for academic staff is provided in the Faculty Performance Evaluation Guidelines. The University Academic Council recently revised the appraisal rules and procedures for faculty members to include classroom observation in order to simplify the process and improve objectivity (Portfolio, p.81).

As stated in the Faculty Performance Evaluation Guidelines for Colleges and the Center of Foundation Studies (CFS), faculty members are subject to the same appraisal system. However, forms and rubrics are customised considering the CFS particularities and the Colleges' specificities. Faculty involved in teaching and leadership positions are subject to two evaluations. Performance appraisal for Teaching Assistants has recently been approved and appraisal for administrative employees is under revision (Portfolio, p.81) which also includes the senior leadership positions of Deputy Vice Chancellor, Dean and Director.

The Panel appreciates the University's efforts to optimize the performance appraisal to improve the system as it is a key instrument for professional development planning (see Section 8.5). However, academic and administrative staff indicated that employees feel performance appraisal is primarily an instrument to decide on the extension of the working contract. The Panel found that feedback, discussions or consultation with staff on their professional development is not consequently followed-up after the appraisal. The University is encouraged to provide individual feedback to staff on their performance appraisal and to regularly review and evaluate its performance appraisal system.

8.7   Promotion and Other Incentives

Incentives are described in the HRA Bylaws. The University offers compensation for staff teaching overtime and a number of allowances like tuition discounts to employees and dependents, medical coverage and support for administration staff continued education

enrolment. Routine increments as well as benefits for expatriate faculty are indicated in the contracts of the employees and the University revised its pay scales in 2013 to retain qualified staff (Portfolio, p.81).

Promotion procedures are documented in the HRA Bylaws which indicate that promotions are clearly based on the performance appraisal. For promotion decisions concerning administrative staff, the Vice Chancellor has the authority to constitute a committee to evaluate and make recommendations for final approval by the Vice Chancellor. The Panel found that members of academic and administrative staff seemed to be unaware of the University`s promotion procedure and encountered a lack of transparency with regard to promotion and salary entitlements. The Panel noted that the recent appointments of acting heads of department or unit have led to a certain level of confusion between staff and was informed that the nominations were a result of the Staff Relocation Policy. UoB is urged to address the lack of transparency at senior management level and ensure that the procedures for promotion and/or relocation are clearly communicated to all UoB employees.

> **Recommendation 34**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a transparent promotion policy and remuneration system that is clearly communicated to all staff and fairly implemented.**

8.8   *Severance*

Severance at the University of Buraimi is guided by the relevant policies – the Faculty Code of Conduct, Harassment, Dress Code, and Non-compliance Disciplinary Procedures (Portfolio, p.82). The Bylaws also indicate the University's right to terminate a contract without prior warning and end of service indemnity in cases listed. In these cases and in non-compliance disciplinary procedures, the University will grant the employees the opportunity to give their statement, however no formal appeal procedure is granted. The Panel was not able to identify a systematic approach to collecting data on staff severance, in the form of exit interviews or questionnaires, in order to address issues leading to staff turnover. UoB is encouraged to develop formal procedures to monitor and evaluate severance procedures including appeals and exit interviews.

8.9   *Staff Organisational Climate and Retention*

The University has put in place a number of incentives to support a positive staff organisational climate and to enhance staff retention. The welcoming and induction of new academic staff is supported by procedures including transportation and hotel accommodation provided on arrival (Portfolio, p.83). As stated in Section 8.4, the induction period was rated positively by the academic staff interviewed. The University also offers a wide range of external and internal organisational activities (Portfolio, p.83). The Panel found that participant numbers at internal organisational activities are recorded and show a good participation rate.

UoB states that analysis of staff retention rates confirm that the organisational climate supports retention of employees (Portfolio, p.83). However the Panel did not find evidence of this with respect to academic staff as the number of academic staff leaving the University increased from 9.71% to 17.02% between 2013 and 2014. During interviews, the Panel received positive feedback from staff regarding motivation and commitment towards the University. However, staff were dissatisfied with the overload caused by the undifferentiated high teaching load, committee obligations and research expectations. The Panel encourages the University to address this issue at management level and develop strategies that will retain highly motivated and

committed staff. UoB is urged to develop a formal system to evaluate staff satisfaction that includes systematic evaluation on staff exit interviews.

> **Recommendation 35**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a formal system to evaluate staff satisfaction and use this data to inform staff retention strategies aimed at improving staff retention rates.**

8.10   *Omanisation*

UoB strives to improve employment opportunities for qualified Omani nationals as part of the University's social responsibility, legal requirements as well as compliance with its institutional goal three (Portfolio, p.84). In the HRA Bylaws it is stated that equally qualified Omanis are given preference during recruitment and the University grants study leave to Omani employees for further education. As an additional incentive to young Omani graduates the University introduced positions for Teaching Assistants at the Colleges and Centre for Foundation Studies in 2015, encouraging Omani employees to pursue a career in fields of education that are the primary focus of UoB (Portfolio, p.85). The Panel appreciates the commitment and initiatives of the University towards Omanisation and supports the University in its efforts. However, recruitment of Teaching Assistants is low which is partly due to financial issues. The Panel concluded that UoB needs to review its recruitment and retention strategies of Omani staff particularly in the academic area.

9   GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

UoB is committed to providing a conducive, supportive, and safe environment and facilities to its community (Portfolio, p.85). The University is expected to move to a new campus in July 2016 which will take place in stages. In stage one, the institution will occupy four new multi-storey buildings that accommodate central administration, library resources, classroom and laboratory facilities to support all academic programs. Future facility expansion will occur in subsequent stages that will include moving to a dedicated library building, student dormitories, student cafeteria, and other academic support buildings.

This Chapter reports on the University's planning and management of its general support services in relation to public relations and marketing; communication services; and facilities management.

9.1   *General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management*

This area of operation is managed by the Deputy Vice Chancellor - Finance and Administrative Affairs with the help of two departments, the Administrative Affairs Department and the Technical Affairs Department and they interact closely with the departments in charge of finance and procurement. Responsibility extends to the planning and maintenance of the entire campus. The visit to the new campus by Panel members confirmed the University's recognition of the need for new facilities to address a number of issues associated with capacity, equipment provisioning, and access to upgraded technology to improve the student learning experience and to enhance maintenance of the campus infrastructure. The Panel heard that the stage one campus is expected to serve a student body more than twice UoB's current size, and long-term capacity may meet demand for up to 15,000 students. The Panel was impressed with the architectural design of the new campus and with the facility maintenance technology incorporated into each building. The Panel supports UoB in its move to the new campus and the associated expansion plans. This also demonstrates that the institution engages in concerted planning efforts to ensure ample physical capacity is in place to accommodate student enrollment growth into the distant future.

> **Affirmation 4**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the University of Buraimi on the need to upgrade and expand campus facilities in order to better serve students, faculty and other stakeholders and supports the University's impending transition to a new, larger, and better equipped campus that harnesses advances in technology, campus design, and safety and security measures.**

9.2   *Public Relations and Marketing*

The Marketing Department of UoB is the operational entity in charge of internal and external communication; including media events, press releases, and hosting of community engagement activities (Portfolio, p.86). According to submitted documentation and onsite interviews, the institution held seven marketing events between 2013 and 2015, both inside and outside of Oman. In addition, there are two campus newsletters (Beacon and Inspire) to update students and faculty on past and future events, accomplishments, and awards received. The Panel heard that publications include the Student Guide, student orientation brochures, information leaflets, and calendars. To market its brand identity, the University produces a range of products such as coffee mugs, flash drives, pens, bags, car sunshades, mouse pads, calendars, and agenda booklets. Although the institution engages in a range of activities to market its academic programs and to advertise the campus to prospective students and the outside community, the Panel could not find an integrated marketing strategy. Given that the institution is still at an early stage of its

development, the Panel urges UoB to develop and implement a proactive marketing strategy that sets out student recruitment goals and describes in some detail the markets for prospective students (e.g. General Education Diploma graduate pool within Buraimi and other regions of Oman and possibly outside of Oman).

> **Recommendation 36**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement an integrated marketing strategy to enhance student recruitment to support the institutional Mission and Vision.**

9.3   *Communication Services*

UoB's communication mechanisms are aimed to ensure timely and clear exchange of information and decisions and hence it uses a number of appropriate communication channels (Portfolio, p.87). The institution's communication services rely on a range of media like email, MS SharePoint, and SIS to keep the campus community and students informed.

In terms of the language of communication, UoB provided some documents in Arabic (example, Student Behavior Rules and Regulations, Steering Committee formation and Minutes) and some in English. The Panel found that UoB has no formal policy to determine the language of communication; UoB is therefore urged to develop a formal policy on the language of communication and develop mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness.

> **Recommendation 37**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the University of Buraimi develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy policy, including the use of English and Arabic and establish mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness.**

9.4   *Facilities Management*

UoB states that "the limitations of the temporary campus are managed effectively by not only building new facilities and infrastructure but also monitoring utilisation of available resources and facilities" (Portfolio, p.88). The Panel's evaluation of the institution's facilities management and maintenance takes into account the impending move to its new permanent campus, as the current campus has provided a temporary site for operation. Documents consulted show maintenance of facilities inventory, usage, and modifications and/or improvements to the current campus. Selected functions like catering services are outsourced with contractual agreements in place.

One concern the Panel had was in relation to sufficient staffing to conduct maintenance for teaching laboratory. During the site visit of the labs, the Panel noted that routine maintenance of labs is typically carried out by the faculty using the lab. As the University transitions to the new, much larger campus, the Panel suggests that necessary equipment and facilities maintenance resources, including dedicated technical staff for laboratories are in place to ensure smooth operation at the new campus. UoB should ensure a far more efficient and effective operation of buildings and associated equipment and ensure that it collects feedback from staff and students to inform action and improvement.

APPENDIX A.   AUDIT PANEL

Dr. Josephine Palermo (Chair)
General Manager
Telstra Operations
Australia

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

Dr. Nicola Huson
Head of Masters Programme DaF
German Jordanian University
Jordan

Dr. Huda Mohammed
Dean
Ibra Nursing Institute
Oman

Mariana Ferrao
Acting Director of Quality Assurance
A'Sharqiyah University
Oman

Hannah Manogaran
Review Director
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA)
Oman

APPENDIX B.   ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

The following abbreviations, acronyms and terms are used in this Report. As necessary, they are explained in context. In some cases, URLs are provided to facilitate further enquiries about these acronyms and terms.

ADRI	A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising: Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.
Approach	The first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating what a HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to achieve it.
AY	Academic Year
BoD	Board of Directors
BoT	Board of Trustees
CAB	College Advisory Board
CFS	Centre for Foundation Studies
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CO	Course Outcome
CoB	College of Business
CoE	College of Engineering
CoHS	College of Health Sciences
DGE	Diploma of General Education
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
DVC-AA	Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs
DVC-FAA	Deputy Vice Chancellor for Financial and Administrative Affairs
Deployment	The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not
External Reviewer	A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the OAAA's various external review Panels
GFP	General Foundation Program
HEAC	Higher Education Admission Center
HRA	Human Resources Affairs
HEI	Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider)
ICE	Industry and Community Engagement
Improvement	The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how effectively an organisation is improving its *approach* and *deployment* for any given topic in order to achieve better *results*
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LRC	Learning Resource Center
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oaaaov.om)

OAAA Board .... The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

OFI .... Opportunity for improvement

OQF .... Oman Qualifications Framework

Panel Chairperson .... The Chairperson of the Audit Panel

Panel Member .... An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel

PO .... Program Objectives

Portfolio .... see *Quality Audit Portfolio*

QAD .... Quality and Accreditation Department

Quality Assurance .... The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met

Quality Audit .... An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision

Quality Audit Portfolio .... The report produced as the result of a self study. Also forms the main submission made to the OAAA by the HEI being audited.

Quality Audit Report .... A public report published by the OAAA which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel's External Review of a HEI.

Quality Enhancement .... The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing *approach*, *deployment* and *results*

Random Interview .... An interview conducted *in situ* by individual Panel Members during the Audit but separately from the main interview sessions

Results .... The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's *approach* and *deployment*

Review Director .... An OAAA staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide professional guidance and support

ROSQA …………………………… Requirement for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Sic ……………………………….. indicates that the preceding segment of the quote was copied faithfully, in spite of a mistake

SAC .... Student Advisory Council

SEAAC .... Student Engagement and Academic Advertisement Centre

SIS .... Student Information System

SO .... Student Outcomes

System .... In this Report, *system* refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose

TaLENT .... Teaching and Learning and Enhancement, Novelty, Transformation

UAC .... University Academic Council

UoB .... University of Buraimi

VC .... Vice Chancellor

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