Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Report of an Audit of College of Applied Sciences Sur

May 2013

Audit Report Number 33

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 – formerly the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC)) of the College of Applied Sciences (CAS) Sur. It comments on CAS Sur'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 CAS Sur's activities, and constructive feedback to CAS Sur to assist with its on-going improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with CAS Sur undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarised in their *Quality Audit Portfolio* (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the due date of 25 August 2012.

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. Following Panel discussion of the CAS Sur Portfolio *via* email, the Audit Panel Chairperson's representative and the Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to CAS Sur on 20 October 2012 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 CAS Sur's activities. No submission was received.

The audit visit took place over 2 – 4 December 2012. During this time, the Panel spoke with over 90 people, including representatives of the governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. It also visited a selection of venues and reviewed a range of additional materials.

No information provided after 4 December 2012 (being the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit, other than one pre-existing item specifically requested by the Panel in advance.

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

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 22 May 2013.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No. 54/2010 to replace the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC). 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 interesting because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2, 6 and 7). 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. 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

The College of Applied Sciences (CAS) Sur is one of six Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASs) that operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). CAS Sur was founded in 1987 with the responsibility of producing teachers and was upgraded in 1995 to become Sur College of Education. A Royal Decree in 2005 converted the College into the College of Applied Sciences, in an effort to meet national employment market needs. CAS Sur comprises six academic departments with their heads reporting to the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research, and there are four administrative departments under the management of the Assistant Dean for Academic Support Affairs. The two Assistant Deans report to the College Dean, the nominal head of the institution. CAS Sur campus spreads over 100,000 square meters and encompasses ten buildings and some playing fields for students' recreation. During the academic year 2011-2012, the College enrolled 1,038 students and has a total of 187 staff members occupying different academic and administrative positions.

The Vision, Mission and Values statements and the Strategic Plan of all the Colleges within the CAS network are developed and adopted centrally by committees established by the MoHE, and all six Colleges are subject to the same Executive Bylaw. As with all Colleges in the network, the College is governed by a Board of Trustees; chaired by the Minster of Higher Education, and is under the direct supervision of the Director General of the CAS network. One of the main challenges the College faces is the significant delay in decision making and policy development and provision within the system. This hinders the flexibility and ability of the College to meet identified objectives. The Panel is of the view that CAS Sur, in conjunction with the MoHE, needs to review the effectiveness of its governance and management processes. The Panel noted that the current CAS Sur Annual Plan is not clearly aligned with the Strategic Plan and needs to include key performance indicators and methods for assessing and analysing data gathered.

The Panel supports CAS Sur in its efforts to operate in a more expeditious manner in relation to policy management and specific policy development. The College needs to ensure that key policies and systems (such as risk management, student grievance and complaints, anti-plagiarism, research ethics and intellectual property, and health and safety) are developed and implemented consistently across the institution. Moreover, the College needs to adopt a systematic approach to reviewing and quality assuring its academic and administrative activities. At the time of the audit, the College was offering three Bachelor degree programmes; namely: Communication Studies, Information Technology, and Applied Biotechnology, in addition to the Foundation Programme. Initially the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC) was responsible for the development and quality assurance of the curriculum design and delivery. However, the agreement ended in 2011, and the Panel was unable to clarify what arrangements were introduced to replace NZTEC's role. In the process of developing its replacement for a programme-level quality assurance system, CAS Sur needs to make certain that the new system assures the academic standards of the College's offerings and its graduates.

In the academic year 2011-2012, CAS Sur started a new programme in Applied Biotechnology, after a comprehensive in-house programme development process. The Panel commends the College on the effective procedures it has established to develop new programmes following the end of the agreement with NZTEC. Graduate attributes to underpin all programmes are determined centrally across all the CAS network and CAS Sur has identified the need to develop a more systematic strategy for embedding the

attributes within the design and delivery of curricula and for evaluating the extent to which these attributes are achieved. The Panel concluded that CAS Sur also needs to ensure that its curriculum design and delivery reflect the applied nature of the programmes and that assessment methods measure the achieved learning outcomes. Students admitted to the CAS colleges are required to complete a Foundation Programme if they do not meet the level for direct entry into the higher education programmes. The Panel noted that the exit point for the CAS Sur Foundation Programme is not consistent with the suggested equivalent in Oman's Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs (GFP). This issue needs to be addressed as a priority in order to ensure that students have the appropriate level to pursue their studies in English. The Panel supports CAS Sur's efforts to systematically monitor, evaluate and improve the teaching and learning experience provided to its students. The College has recently implemented procedures to track its graduates, but there is no alumni association in place as yet. Past students and employers can provide useful feedback on the graduates attributes and can be a resource for publicising the College and its work in the local community and throughout Oman, but are currently under-used.

While CAS Sur's primary focus has been on teaching, scientific research has been included in the Strategic Plan and efforts in this area need to be progressed. The College is urged to develop and implement a research plan which identifies the prioritisation of research activities as well as opportunities for collaborative research with partners. The Panel encourages the College to review its communications with the MoHE and to utilise more extensively the data available through the Student Information System for planning student support services and informing decision-making. Moreover, the Panel was concerned that student feedback was not sought actively and addressed systematically at CAS Sur. The utilisation of e-learning resources is hampered by a number of factors, including the centralisation of these resources at the MoHE; the slowness of the internet service provided on campus and the lack of availability of wi-fi facilities in the hostels for female students. The Panel was concerned with the lack of appropriate on-campus medical care services including first aid care and urges CAS Sur, in conjunction with the MoHE, to address this matter. The Panel commends the Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre for implementing an effective system for student work placements; career guidance; and preparation for the job market.

Staff recruitment and selection is conducted through a centralised mechanism managed by the MoHE. CAS Sur needs to develop and implement a human resources plan providing the concerned departments with more autonomy in the selection process in order to support a more consistent level of staff academic quality as well as ownership of decisions in staffing. Staff appraisals are mainly conducted using the MoHE's "Performance Report" but the outcome is not shared with the staff member concerned. The Moreover, CAS Sur does not have a local professional development programme. The College needs to develop and implement its own staff development plan for both its academic and administrative staff, including senior staff management, which is linked to and informed by the outcome of the staff appraisals. While CAS Sur has been successful in Omanising most of its administrative positions, it acknowledges that it has faced challenges in placing Omanis in academic positions. The College needs to exert more rigorous efforts towards employing more Omanis in line with its strategic objectives.

The Panel acknowledges the College's efforts in seeking to improve further campus life and existing facilities. It was considered, nonetheless, that more is needed as the College lacks recreational facilities for both students and staff. CAS Sur has undergone major changes in its transformation from a College of Education to a College of Applied Sciences. However, it still has significant work to do in order to enable the College to fulfil its Vision and Mission statements. A summary of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations follows in the order they appear in the Report.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

Summary of Affirmations

A formal Affirmation recognises an instance in which CAS Sur 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 CAS Sur has either not yet accurately identified or to which it is not yet adequately attending.

1   GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The College of Applied Sciences (CAS) Sur is one of six Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASs) that operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). All six Colleges are subject to the same regulations and Executive Bylaw. A Royal Decree converted the former Sur College of Education into CAS Sur during 2005/2006, in an effort to meet national market employment needs (Portfolio, p.7).

This Chapter of the Report covers the Audit Panel's findings on institutional governance and management of CAS Sur. More specifically, it covers the following topic areas: Mission, Vision and Values; governance; management; institutional affiliations for programmes and quality assurance; strategic and operational planning; financial management; risk management; policy management; entity and activity review; student grievance; and health and safety.

1.1   *Mission, Vision and Values*

The Vision, Mission and Values statements of all the Colleges within the CAS network are developed and adopted centrally by a committee established by the MoHE, as stated in the Portfolio, and are as follows:

The Vision:

CAS *will play a vital role in taking Oman forward in the world as a modernised nation, through their contribution to applied sciences and to the advancement of civilisation in a knowledge society consistent with the Omani cultural values* (Portfolio, p.14).

The Mission:

CAS responsibilities are the transfer and creation of current knowledge through cooperation, practical orientation and intensive collaboration with students, communities and businesses, which will provide the foundation to underpin Oman's development and its success in the global economy (Portfolio, p.14).

The Mission and Vision statements are underpinned by the following Values:

- *Commitment to students, who are at the heart of academic activity;*
- *Partnership between staff, students and industry to achieve harmony and prosperity;*
- *Excellence to achieve the highest audited standards in teaching quality, knowledge transfer, applied research and international academic recognition;*
- *The adoption of a needs-driven policy to ensure alignment with business and student employability;*
- *Reliance on knowledge transfer, making use of a knowledge base to support the economy* (Portfolio, p.14).

Although the Vision, Mission, and Values statements of the CAS network entities have been developed centrally, the Panel saw evidence of reassessment of these statements initiated by the MoHE, with opportunities for CAS Sur to provide feedback. Opportunities for differentiation occur within the individual Colleges through the development of their annual Operational Plans; specialised training programmes to address identified regional needs; community engagement to promote and nurture regional and national initiatives; and opportunities to develop new degree programmes such as CAS Sur's new Applied Biotechnology BSc Programme that is a unique offering within the CAS network (Portfolio, p.7). The level that CAS Sur utilises these opportunities is discussed throughout the following sections of this Report.

1.2   *Governance*

The six Colleges within the CAS network are governed by the Minister of Higher Education (the 'Minister'), the CAS network Board of Trustees (BoT), and the CAS Academic Council (AC). The work of the CAS network is achieved through various positions, divisions and committees supporting the network's and the MoHE's activities (Portfolio, p.14). The BoT consists of nine members representing both public and industry sectors, and is chaired by the Minister.   The Deputy Chairperson is the Undersecretary of the MoHE (Undersecretary), and the Secretary of the BoT is the Director General of the CAS network (DG). Other members of the BoT are appointed through a prescribed process in which names are submitted to the Chair of the BoT for approval. The BoT is the supreme governing body of the CAS network and its role, as defined in the Executive Bylaw, is integral to establishing strategies and operational policies for the CAS network as well as for following up on their implementation. The BoT is expected to meet four times annually (Portfolio, p.15).

The Undersecretary chairs the AC, which acts as the academic senate for the CAS Colleges. The AC's members include the DG, the Deans of the six Colleges and three members from the academic staff.   The role of the AC is one of centralised oversight of the academic programmes for all the CAS campuses, the maintenance of the CAS Executive Bylaw and other duties designated by the BoT (Portfolio, p.16). The DG has the responsibility of the direct supervision of CAS Sur as well as the other Colleges within the CAS network. The CAS network level Programme Directors (PDs) are responsible for the implementation and delivery of the programmes, subject area content within each CAS College, and participation in specific Strategic Plan activities (Portfolio, pp. 19, 26, 29, 36, 70). However, the PDs do not formally sit on the AC; they report to the DG and attend the AC meetings only upon invitation. Moreover, the CAS Bylaw does not stipulate the role of the PDs, and the Panel identified this as an omission that requires addressing. More on this is given in Section 1.3 of this Report.

During interviews, the Panel was informed that policy development was in progress at the Ministry level, and that it was the BoT's responsibility to establish the required policies for the CAS Colleges, for following up on their implementation and for ensuring that CAS network-wide initiatives are progressing in an appropriate and timely manner. Nonetheless, the Panel also became aware of delays in significant CAS policy development and approval of decisions that had been taken at the College level (see Section 1.9). These delays hinder the ability of CAS Sur to meet identified objectives. While the Panel acknowledges that CAS Sur falls under the jurisdiction of the MoHE, the centralised BoT, the AC and the DG, resulting in a top-down governance and management approach, it is of the view that there is a need to review the effectiveness of this governance and management system in order to create greater synergy and operational effectiveness at all levels.

> **Recommendation 1**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review the effectiveness of its current governance and management system, including mechanisms for timely decision-making, to ensure it is supporting the College in fulfilling its Mission, Vision and strategic objectives**

1.3   *Management*

The Ministerial Decree 16/2010 identifies the organisational structure of each College within the CAS network (Portfolio, p.17), while the roles of each major position within the organisation, except for the PDs, are outlined in the Executive Bylaw. Appointment of the CAS Sur Dean, Assistant Deans, Heads of Academic Departments, Centre Directors, and faculty members, as well as the approval of the terms and regulations of employment and promotions in the College

are centralised and move through prescribed processes outlined in the Bylaw, approved by the Minister. The Dean, who reports to the DG, has primary responsibility for the day-to-day management of CAS Sur and is supported by the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research, the Assistant Dean for Academic Support Affairs, the Director of Administrative and Financial Affairs Office (AFAO), the Head of the Learning Resource Centre (LRC), the Head of Admission and Registration Centre (ARC), the Head of the Student Services Centre (SSC), and the Head of the Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre (TSCCC).

The Dean chairs the CAS Sur College Council (CC) that is comprised of the two Assistant Deans, the Heads of Academic Departments, the Head of Scientific Research, the Centre Directors, and the Director of AFAO (Portfolio, pp. 15-18). The Panel noted that certain network and College-level responsibilities appear to overlap, with lines of authority becoming blurred. For example, PDs lead programme delivery within all Colleges, and provide programme quality assurance across the CAS network. At the same time, however, the Panel was informed that the Dean, the Heads of Departments (HoDs), the CC, and other relevant positions or committees also monitor programme content and quality at the College level, with no clear line of communication between the PDs and the Dean and the CC with regard to academic matters. Furthermore, the PDs have specified responsibilities within many areas of the Strategic Plan, either individually or collaboratively in conjunction with CAS Sur staff members, depending upon the goal or activity. As a result, questions about the nature of organisational structures, policies and overlapping responsibilities and lines of reporting continually arose for the Panel throughout the audit. The Panel believes that a clarification of roles and responsibilities at network level and College-level would be beneficial for all stakeholders.

The Panel appreciates the challenges associated with transforming of a College of Education into a College of Applied Sciences and it noted the debates and discussions recorded in both the AC and CC minutes of meetings. Notwithstanding that, the Panel found no evidence of a formal mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the performance of CAS Sur senior management and urges the College to formulate a systematic professional development programme to support the management.

> **Recommendation 2**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, clarify the role and responsibilities of staff members at centralised and College level and develop and implement a mechanism to evaluate the performance of the College's senior management which is aligned to appropriate professional development where required.**

1.4   *Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance*

The MoHE signed an agreement with the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC) in 2006 for the purpose of transforming Colleges of Education into Colleges of Applied Sciences (Portfolio, p.19). Through the experience of the NZTEC partnership, the Panel was informed that the CAS Colleges have sought to develop system-level and individual college-level staff competencies and skill-sets related to programme development and maintenance, and to adequately support teaching and learning across the CAS network. The Panel saw evidence of areas of good practice related to programme development, delivery and assessment within individual departments or specific programmes such as in the Foundation Programme. But despite the College's description of the positive outcomes of the previous relationship with NZTEC (Portfolio, p.19), the Panel could not find any evidence that CAS Sur has set in place arrangements to replace NZTEC or that it had made appropriate progress in developing and implementing a College-wide systems approach to quality assurance (see Section 1.10).

1.5   Strategic Plan

An overall Strategic Plan has been developed for all Colleges in the CAS network. The Strategic Plan provided to the Panel was detailed Phase I plan to be achieved by end of 2010 and Indicative Actions for Phase II (2011-2015). It contained six strategic goals and related objectives. The Strategic Plan uses a standardised template to identify areas of focus and with mapped actions, indicators, targets and responsibilities that are objective-driven.   The Panel noted that the Strategic Plan did not have clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) attached to it. Whilst the Panel acknowledges the progress made to date in several areas of the Strategic Plan at CAS Sur, there are some other focus areas that have yet to be fully addressed or completed (see Section 1.9). But without clearly stated KPIs and a formal mechanism for monitoring and evaluation, it is very hard to assess the progress achieved within the deployment of the Strategic Plan.

During the audit visit, the Panel learned that the CAS network is aware of some of the shortcomings of the current Strategic Plan and that discussions were underway at the System-level regarding the revision/updating of the plan. The new Strategic Plan for the CAS network, the Panel was informed, is expected to be approved and rolled out early in 2013. As indicated in Section 1.2, the Panel was concerned about the delay in the execution of decision-making processes at the central level that requires moving through layers of bureaucracy prior to approving CAS Sur proposals.   The Panel believes that such delays can negatively impact efficiency at all levels of planning and development.   Examples include CAS network level contracting processes that can delay for years the completion of new facilities such as the new Learning Technology Centre.   In addition, the College states that these network-level processes can negatively impact price quoting and the delivery of goods at the College level (Portfolio, pp.65-72).   Such circumstances impede the College's progress toward achieving its operational effectiveness as well as constrain its ability to achieve alignment with the CAS Strategic Plan and values statements in a timely manner (see Recommendation 1).

1.6   Operational Planning

The CAS Sur Annual Plan, the College's primary operational plan, is a list of initiatives and actions for each academic and administrative area of the College. It identifies topic areas to be addressed, lists goals related to topic areas, itemises implementation methods, sets out implementation dates, and identifies positions or individuals responsible for certain activities. As such, the Plan is a "to do" list of activities and strategies for managing the College.

The Panel noted that the College Plan did not include clear KPIs or methods for assessing and analysing data gathered for continuous improvement.   The Panel also found little evidence to show that the College was systematically developing and implementing its operational plan and aligning it with the Strategic Plan.   The Panel encourages the College to align better its operational plan with the CAS Strategic Plan and to strengthen the linkage of its operational plans to the activity plans across the different areas of the College.

> **Recommendation 3**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement operational plans which are aligned with the Strategic Plan and that achievements against operational objectives are evaluated against predefined key performance indicators.**

1.7   Financial Management

As with all the other Colleges within the CAS network, CAS Sur is required to submit, through the MoHE, an annual budget to the Ministry of Finance (MoF).   The Director of AFAO is charged with the preparation and maintenance of the College budget as directed by the MoF and with the oversight of the Dean.   The College has two types of budgets: operational and

developmental. While CAS Sur controls the operational budget, the Department of Projects in the MoHE oversees the developmental budget. The College may seek additional funding support from the MoHE or MoF when necessary, and the College also has the ability to move funds to different line items of the operational budget, when priorities necessitate (Portfolio, p.20). The Panel noted that the College has maintained financial stability and continued to fulfil its financial obligations despite the limited resources available.

1.8   Risk Management

The College stated that it seeks to minimise and avoid the "likelihood of unexpected risks whether they are operational, financial, or strategic" (Portfolio, P.20). However, it has yet to develop and implement a policy on assessing and managing risks. The Panel noted that such policy had not been developed or operationalised at the time of the audit visit. The lack of a risk management system may expose the College and its operations to considerable and avoidable risk.

> **Recommendation 4**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement a comprehensive risk management system that includes risk identification and mitigation strategies for all aspects of the College's activities.**

1.9   Policy Management

Policy development is a process involving the MoHE, the BoT and the AC at the central CAS level, and the Executive Bylaw includes the required processes at the College level. The current Strategic Plan includes policy management objectives and goals that are yet to be addressed and achieved by the College. As mentioned in Section 1.2, the lack of policy development and implementation at the College-level poses significant problems for addressing the Strategic Plan objectives within CAS Sur and evaluating the effectiveness of its operations. CAS Sur acknowledges that it needs to increase its efforts to fully develop and implement appropriate policies such as an effective operations policy and a promotions policy (Portfolio, pp.21-22). During the audit visit, the Panel learned that some progress related to policy management and specific policy development is underway at CAS Sur. This activity involves relevant constituents and stakeholders. The Panel supports these efforts to address policy management and strongly encourages the College to progress in a more expeditious manner.

> **Affirmation 1**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, the College needs to implement a policy development and management system and supports its efforts in undertaking this initiative.**

1.10   Entity and Activity Review Systems

CAS Sur states that it works with the MoHE to improve processes and outcomes of academic and non-academic activities (Portfolio, p.22). The College identifies the agreement between CAS and NZTEC as providing "the basis for the most important review mechanism available within each College" (Portfolio, p.23). While the Panel considered evidence to show that NZTEC carried out reviews, such as the Graduate Review in 2011, there was no evidence of a College-level action plan in response to NZTEC review recommendations.

The final NZTEC Graduate Review report was received in March 2012 and submitted to the AC in April 2012. However, the Panel was unable to find evidence that the NZTEC report was

discussed at the College by the CC, nor that it had been disseminated to all appropriate stakeholders, despite the Bylaw stating that the Dean, Assistant Deans and HoDs all have specific responsibilities for such matters. Additionally, the Panel was unable to find evidence of a College-wide evaluation of the effectiveness of the academic and administrative operations at CAS Sur. Such an activity could provide an opportunity to review and evaluate the College-level processes for addressing the recommendations of the NZTEC report in a timely fashion, including compliance and alignment with the Executive Bylaw and the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

The Panel acknowledges that there are pockets of good review practices in certain areas of the degree programmes that have resulted from the partnership with NZTEC as well as through individual initiatives. The Panel believes nonetheless that the College should consider adopting a systematic approach to evaluation and review of its activities which includes planning (or development of plans); identifying benchmarks and best practices; implementation of plans; collection and analysis of data generated from planned activities and using this data to inform on-going continuous improvement. This should include the College's academic and non-academic activities.

> **Recommendation 5**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review its quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that they are formalised; consistently implemented; routinely monitored; and regularly evaluated to underpin the quality culture within the College and support a cycle of continuous improvement.**

1.11   Student Grievance Process

The College has identified the need to address student grievances and related issues more effectively and have suggested remedial plans that would result in confidence building and better processes for submitting suggestions (Portfolio, p.24). During audit visit interviews, College staff members described problems encountered with the past inefficient student grievance process that fostered face to face access to the Dean for almost all students' grievances. As a result, students are now required to submit first written requests to the Dean as a method for addressing their issues. They can also submit issues to be addressed *via* a Student Grievance Form on the final examination results (Portfolio, pp.58-59).

The Panel also noted that, at the time of the audit visit, the College was making a transition to a new system which channels students' complaints through a mechanism in which academic advisors play a stronger role in addressing students' concerns (Portfolio, p.24). This was confirmed during audit visit meetings with staff and students.

> **Affirmation 2**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that there is a need to develop and implement a formal student grievance and complaint system which is communicated to relevant stakeholders, monitored and evaluated for effectiveness, and supports its efforts in this area.**

1.12   Health and Safety

The College states that it attempts to address health and safety issues by ensuring safety measures are employed in the Biology laboratories and by placing fire and safety equipment strategically throughout the campus (Portfolio, p.42 and p.83). A formal request has been submitted to the

Ministry of Health for an onsite medical unit but the Panel was informed, during meetings with staff, that this request had not been approved. The Panel also noted that the College had submitted another request to the DG regarding a new job position for a member of staff to be responsible for safety. The Panel was informed that until the time of the audit visit no formal reply had been received.

In the meantime, the College reported that it had a designated individual who is the College's emergency contact and a designated vehicle for transporting individuals to a health facility when necessary (Portfolio, p.64). Nonetheless, the Panel had concerns about the general welfare of students, staff and visitors on a campus without an appropriate on-site healthcare professional such as someone trained in first aid and emergency care to address health and safety needs in a more timely manner. The Panel noted that foam and carbon dioxide fire extinguishers, as well as hose reels, are available throughout the College. There is also a fire alarm system that is regularly checked. The Panel, however, found no evidence of a formal policy and procedure to ensure the health and safety of its students and staff. This matter needs to be addressed (see Section 9.4).

> **Recommendation 6**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement an effective health and safety policy and appropriate procedures that include the recruitment of qualified personnel to ensure the health and safety of all its students and staff.**

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

This section is not applicable as CAS Sur has no associated entities.

2   STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMMES

CAS Sur notes its third and fourth values as follows:

Excellence: to achieve the highest audited standards in teaching quality, knowledge transfer, applied research and international academic recognition (Portfolio, p.14)

The adoption of a needs-driven policy to ensure alignment with business and student employability (Portfolio, p.14)

At the time of the audit, the College was offering three Bachelor degree programmes; Communication Studies, Information Technology, and Applied Biotechnology (introduced in 2011-2012), in addition to the Foundation Programme (FP). From 2006-2011, the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC) was responsible for the development and quality assurance of the curriculum design and delivery. This Chapter reflects the Panel's findings in the areas of student learning by coursework programmes including graduate attributes; curriculum; student entry standards; teaching quality; plagiarism; student placement and retention; student assessment; academic security; graduate destinations and employability.

2.1   *Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives*

Graduate attributes were determined centrally by NZTEC in liaison with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and are standard across the CAS network (Portfolio, p.25). A distinction is made between generic attributes, which are common across all programmes, and specialised and professional attributes which are associated with specific programmes. There have been initial efforts by some departments at CAS Sur, such as the Communication Department, to map graduate attributes and learning outcomes to the curriculum. Nevertheless, the Panel found little evidence of a coherent overarching strategy to integrate the graduate attributes into the curriculum, teaching and learning approaches and assessment plans of all programmes. It is left to individual programmes and individual teaching staff to link course learning outcomes to the graduate attributes.

The Panel noted, however, that the College itself identified the need to develop a more systematic strategy:

> *The College needs to develop a more systematic strategy for embedding its graduate attributes within the design and delivery of the curriculum. Attention should also be paid to the effective communication of the graduate attributes to students and how the attainment of those attributes is evaluated"* (Portfolio, p.25).

The Panel learned through interview sessions that steps are being taken to improve in this area and there are discussions and debates within programme delivery teams on how to formally address these issues. The Panel encourages the efforts being made in this area.

> **Affirmation 3**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that it needs to develop a systematic strategy to incorporate graduate attributes into the design and delivery of all programme curricula; to communicate graduate attributes to all stakeholders and to assess the level of attainment of these attributes, and supports its efforts in this area.**

2.2   Curriculum

According to the agreement with the MoHE from 2006-2011, NZTEC supported the development of the curriculum, teaching and learning documentation, quality assurance, and provided assistance with the moderation, benchmarking and review of the programmes. It was also responsible for providing teaching materials to support delivery of lectures (Portfolio, p.26). While the agreement with NZTEC came to an end in 2011, each programme has a Programme Director who is primarily responsible for the moderation and review of the quality of that programme. However, the College is urged to implement a documented, systematic process for continuous programme assessment and improvement that includes regular periodic reviews, external moderation, benchmarking, analysis of assessment results and programme improvement based on the outcomes of the process. In the process of reviewing its quality assurance system (see Recommendation 5), CAS Sur needs to make sure that this system ensures that the academic standards of the College's offerings are maintained and that the quality assurance system is clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

On the basis of the evidence from supporting material and interviews, the Panel found that despite the applied nature of the College programmes, the curriculum design and delivery at CAS Sur focuses on theoretical concepts with limited exposure to applied and practical skills. Concerns were raised during student interview sessions about their perception of having too much theory and not enough practice. This issue has also been raised by the College (Portfolio, p.54). The student satisfaction survey conducted during CAS Sur's self-study process also indicated a need for more courses related to applied research and specialised laboratories to support the teaching of applied sciences. It was also brought to the attention of the Panel that difficulties are faced in teaching practical laboratory sessions due to lack of technical assistants to help faculty during laboratory sessions. This is an area that the College needs to address.

> **Recommendation 7**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur ensure that its curriculum design and delivery reflect the intended applied nature of the programmes in line with the College's Vision and Mission and that the College is adequately resourced to deliver these applied programmes.**

CAS Sur started offering a new BSc in Applied Biotechnology (with majors in Marine Bio-Technology, Food and Agriculture Biotechnology, Environmental Biotechnology) in the academic year 2011-2012, after a comprehensive programme development process which included stakeholder feedback and approval by the BoT (Portfolio, p.7). This programme was the first CAS programme to be developed locally without the support of the NZTEC. The initial intake comprised 60 students. On the basis of the supporting material and interviews, the Panel found that CAS Sur had followed effective procedures for developing and implementing the Bachelor of Applied Biotechnology programme, taking into consideration feedback from relevant stakeholders and the needs of the job market. CAS Sur staff and students have expressed high satisfaction and pride in their home-grown Applied Biotechnology programme.

> **Commendation 1**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends College of Applied Sciences Sur for its effective process for developing and implementing the Bachelor of Applied Biotechnology Programme.**

2.3   Student Entry Standards

Student admission to CAS is centralised and administered by the Higher Education Admission Center (HEAC) in the MoHE. HEAC regulates student entry requirements to the CAS network based on their high school grades and their subject and college choices. CAS Sur enrols students

according to requirements determined by the CAS network at the MoHE level. All programmes require successful completion of the General Education Diploma and a minimum grade of 'C' average in English (Portfolio, p.27). The Panel found no evidence that CAS Sur has evaluated the effectiveness and appropriateness of these student entry standards. The Panel suggests that the College develop a formal mechanism to review its admission requirements and assess its effectiveness in the light of student performance.

2.4   Foundation Programme

Students admitted to the CAS colleges are required to complete a FP if they do not meet the requirements for direct entry into the higher education programmes. During interview sessions, students and staff expressed satisfaction with the implementation of this FP. Students sit an English language placement test and entry tests in mathematics and computer skills and, according to their performance, are assigned to the different levels within the FP. Students can be exempted from the English component of the FP by submitting evidence that they have scored 4.5 on the IELTS test of English or the equivalent TOEFL score (Portfolio, p.28) which is defined as the exit point of the FP.   The Panel noted however that this is not in line with Oman's Academic Standards for General Foundation Programme Standards which requires the exit level of the programme in English to be equivalent to IELTS Band 5. This is an area the College needs to review.

> **Recommendation 8**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review its Foundation Programme exit point so that it is in line with Oman's Academic Standards for General Foundation Programme Standards.**

2.5   Teaching Quality

One of the CAS's values is "excellence to achieve the highest audited standards in teaching quality, knowledge transfer, applied research and international academic recognition" (Portfolio, p.14). During interviews with both staff and students it became clear to the Panel that there are pockets of good practice in teaching at CAS Sur, with some innovative teaching and learning strategies being used. However, the Panel did not see evidence of a clear College-wide pedagogical framework that supports learning activities consistent with the applied nature of the offered programmes or the intention to develop skills of independent inquiry, applied research and creativity as stated in the graduate attributes. As the College develops its approach in this area, it could consider integrating applied research into the degree programmes to support these attributes.

CAS Sur indicated in the Portfolio that it uses peer observation, Head of Department (HoD) and coordinator class visits, coordinator-faculty meetings, and student evaluations of teaching to monitor the quality of teaching (Portfolio, p.29). On the basis of the supporting materials and interviews, the Panel found that these teaching quality monitoring procedures, especially the student evaluations, are not regularly and consistently applied. Neither is there a process for providing feedback to individual instructors. Moreover, the Panel found no evidence of a systematic evaluation of the outcomes of these processes or of the effectiveness of the teaching quality monitoring processes. While the Panel noted that the College recognised the need to address these issues (Portfolio, p.29), it did not see evidence of concrete steps taken towards developing and implementing a College-wide monitoring system. This will be needed to document and evaluate the quality of and the improvements in the teaching and learning experience provided to the CAS Sur students.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur review its system for monitoring the quality of teaching to ensure that it is effective and consistently implemented.

2.6   *Plagiarism*

Plagiarism regulations are included in the CAS Bylaw and are communicated to students in the CAS Student Guide. There have been attempts to use on-line plagiarism detection tools (*Safe Assign* in Blackboard) to check for plagiarism in some departments such as the English Department. The College has identified the need to combat plagiarism and has taken some measures in this regard (Portfolio, p.31). During interview sessions, the Panel noted that CAS Sur was aware of these problems and was actively addressing them. The Panel is of the view that in its effort to address this area, CAS Sur needs to develop and implement a more comprehensive mechanism to monitor the level of plagiarism and assess the effectiveness of measures taken to address the issue.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that it needs to develop and implement a formal and comprehensive mechanism for monitoring the level of plagiarism and the effectiveness of the procedures used to combat it, and supports the College's initial efforts in addressing these issues.

2.7   *Student Work Placements*

The work placement of third year students is seen by the College as an integral part of student's learning experience (Portfolio, p.32). At CAS Sur, the Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre (TSCCC) is responsible for coordinating the student placement system, arranging job fairs, and conducting seminars to help students develop job search skills (Portfolio, p.33). A Student Handbook providing guidance on work placement is available for students.

The Panel found evidence that the student placement programme is working well. The Panel noted, in interviews with stakeholders and in supporting materials, TSCCC's substantial achievements with respect to student placements in terms of making arrangements with various public and private sector companies for student work placements. Employers are provided with a Student Assessment Record template that clearly defines the criteria to be used when evaluating students' performance during work placements. During interview sessions the Panel learned that employers found the template to be very helpful. From the student satisfaction survey, as well as through interviews with students and employers, the Panel also found evidence of effective planning and execution by the TSCCC of career guidance activities including job fairs and workshops on topics such as CV writing and job interview skills (see Section 7.5). The Panel recognises that this activity is clearly having a positive impact on the student learning experience.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Sur for the development and implementation of an effective system for students work placement and career guidance.

2.8   *Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation*

Assessment rules and regulations are stipulated in the CAS Academic Regulations, and all programmes in the CAS network are assessed through a common examination system. The College states that an Examination Committee for each programme, chaired by the appropriate

Programme Director, and comprising the relevant HoDs from the different Colleges of the CAS network that offer the programme, meets at the end of each semester to ensure that assessment and grading are performed in a fair manner and according to the academic regulations (Portfolio, p.35). The Examination Committee makes recommendations with respect to students' final grades to the College Council which is responsible for approving these. The College also states that CAS Sur has a standardised grading system for assessment which reflects students' examination performance (Portfolio, p.35).

Nonetheless, the Panel was unable to find evidence of a consistent assessment moderation and benchmarking system in place. Since the termination of the NZTEC agreement, the College has not arranged for a consistently applied assessment moderation method (such as double-blind marking, external examiners or examination review committees) that would ensure assessment standards are maintained. Moreover, the Panel did not see evidence of a consistently applied method for ensuring that assessment is linked to the intended learning outcomes of courses nor to the attainment of graduate attributes. The College needs to develop and implement a regular review system in order to evaluate the effectiveness of its assessment methods and to ensure that its assessment practices are appropriate and effective in relation to the intended learning outcomes.

> **Recommendation 10**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, develop and implement a regular review system for evaluating student assessment methods and ensuring that the methods used are effective in measuring the achieved learning outcomes.**

2.9   Academic Security and Invigilation

To ensure the integrity and security of the assessment processes, CAS Sur has set up an examination committee, invigilation procedures, guidelines for invigilators, and examination induction programmes (Portfolio, p.36). The Panel found evidence of tight security measures regarding the storage and security of examination question papers and the invigilation of examinations. It concluded that CAS Sur pays rigorous attention to academic security.

> **Commendation 3**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Sur for the development and implementation of effective security measures surrounding the management of examination papers.**

CAS Sur also has in place a clearly defined invigilation policy and procedures that include invigilation regulations, invigilator duty charts, examination induction meetings, guidelines and instructions for examination room management and supervision by HoDs and Course Coordinators (Portfolio, p.37). However, the College is urged to explore the reasons for the reported high absenteeism and increase in the number of cases of cheating (Portfolio, p.60) and take appropriate steps to address the identified challenges in these areas (see Section 7.4).

2.10   Student Retention and Progression

One of the College's strategic objectives is to improve student retention rates through support and remediation (Strategic Plan, p.36). CAS Sur reflects in its Portfolio that academic advisors closely monitor the performance of students under probation and offer them guidance (Portfolio, p.38). The College limits the number of credit hours students under probation may take. As recognised by the College, there is a need to provide access to the Student Information System for student academic advisors (Portfolio, p.39), in order to improve student academic advising and

progression monitoring. The College is encouraged to address this matter in conjunction with the MoHE.

2.11   *Graduate Destinations and Employability*

In April 2012, the Academic Council established a Programme Review Committee at a CAS network level, to ensure that student outcomes are relevant to the workplace and to track employment of graduates through a central information system. The Panel was unable to find evidence of any results achieved by this committee by the time of the audit visit.

However, the Panel was informed that the College has recently implemented procedures to track its graduates. Data is collected by the TSCCC, which follows up students through the SMS, by email and *via* a form distributed at the graduation rehearsal. While CAS Sur recognises the need to seek input from employers and graduates, it does not have formal procedures for tracking its graduates and for collecting and analysing feedback from employers and graduates.   This includes the collection of employment statistics, analysis of the destinations of graduates, monitoring of the quality and performance of graduates and the relevance of their studies to the needs of the job market (Portfolio, p.39). The Panel did not find evidence of concrete plans or steps taken by CAS Sur in this regard even though the need has been identified.

> **Recommendation 11**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement a formal mechanism to track its graduates in order to critically analyse their destinations and consider the implications for the programmes.**

3   STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

At the time of the quality audit, CAS Sur did not offer research programmes *per se* so this section is not addressed in this Report.

4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

According to the current Strategic Plan, scientific research is a requirement in all Colleges of Applied Sciences. In particular, the Strategic Plan states that the Colleges are expected to have a "commitment to the development of a research culture" (p.14) and to encourage "a high standard of scholarship and applied research" (p.6). This Chapter reports the Panel's findings on CAS Sur's activities in staff research and consultancy including planning and management; research performance; funding; intellectual property rights, ethics and biosafety; professional development for research; and the research-teaching nexus.

4.1 Research Planning & Management

The Royal Decree 62/2007 requires the development of scientific research in the CASs. In particular, section 10 of the executive Bylaw states that "A Department of Scientific Research shall be established in each college". CAS Sur has responded by establishing a Scientific Research Department and appointing a Head of Scientific Research, to carry this agenda forward. The College also proposes to set up a Research and Scientific Committee (Portfolio p.40). The Panel appreciates the difficulties that CAS Sur has in initiating a research ethos in a college that only six years ago was training teachers rather than teaching applied sciences.

The Panel was provided with a copy of the *Guidelines for Various Research Activities* document, produced by the Head of Scientific Research which was discussed at a meetings lead by him and attended by the Heads of other academic departments, who supported the Guidelines (Portfolio, p.41). Whilst the Panel finds these first steps to be encouraging, it believes that in the future CAS Sur needs to develop and implement an overarching research plan in line with its Strategic Plan includes funding, incentives, professional development of staff, prioritisation of research activities and monitoring of research performance. The Panel suggests that CAS Sur build upon relationships developed with other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman through research conferences and symposia, and seek ways of developing collaborative research, as part of its overall plan in this area.

> **Recommendation 12**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement a research plan which identifies the prioritisation of research activities as well as opportunities for collaborative research with partners, including other colleges in the CAS network, in line with its Strategic Plan and the needs of business, industry and government.**

4.2 Research Performance

The Panel supports CAS Sur's efforts in establishing a research culture. Over the past five years staff from CAS Sur have presented 38 papers at various seminars and conferences and published seven journal articles. Since 2008 these include presentations at eight conferences or symposia at other institutions within Oman and, in 2010, a two-day symposium was held at CAS Sur. The College proposes to organise two conferences and run a series of internal seminars (Portfolio p.41). The Panel agrees that internal seminars are a good way to initiate research interest and collaboration within the College.

The Strategic Plan states that one of the core values of the CAS colleges is to build partnerships with business, industry, government and other HEIs, and to seek other HEIs with which to partner, with a view to enhancing performance through discipline–based academic partnerships. The Panel believes that collaboration with other academic partners and with business and industry

could boost the College's research and consultancy outputs (see Recommendation 12). The Panel was informed that heavy teaching loads do not allow many academic staff to become research-active. This is a problem that needs to be addressed in the strategic planning and management of the College if it wants to develop its research activities further.

4.3   Funding Schemes

The College states that the lack of funding has been the main obstacle to developing its research culture (Portfolio, p.41). The Panel was informed that funding for research now lies with the individual colleges of the CAS network. The Panel was shown an interim document outlining the methodology for submitting a research proposal and the requirements needed for a proposal to be adopted. As of February 2012 nine research proposals had been submitted, but none had received funding by the time of the audit visit. The Panel encourages the College to develop policies to expeditiously approve funding of staff research proposals as part of its overall strategy in this area. This might be helped by collaboration with other colleges within the CAS network as this would increase the possibility of receiving funds for research activities.

4.4   Consultancy Activities

At present no consultancy services are offered to external clients and there are no plans to do so in the near future. However, the Strategic Plan states that a CAS should "Provide professional services and consultation to private and government bodies" (Portfolio, p.41) The Panel considers that the applied nature of the courses CAS Sur offers and its relationship with the industry and business in the region offers opportunities to develop consultancy activities which may lead to funded, applied research. The Panel suggests that the College finds ways to do this as part of its overall strategy in this area.

4.5   Intellectual Property, Ethics and Biosafety

The CAS Strategic Plan does not include details regarding the development of specific guidelines on intellectual property rights (Portfolio, p.42). Hence, policy regarding registration, patenting and trade marking of original work has not been considered at this level. The Panel was informed that a working group of CAS members and the DG are currently working on this, and the Panel is pleased to note that CAS Sur has gone some way to address this issue in its *Guidelines for Various Research Activities*. It encourages the College to implement these.

A major area that the College also needs to address as its research profile increases is the development of policies on research ethics. Whilst the Panel found evidence that the College has implemented some safety measures in the biotechnology laboratories, it believes that CAS Sur should develop and implement a code of ethics and biosafety standards appropriate for a research-active College delivering Applied Biotechnology programmes.

> **Recommendation 13**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement policies and procedures to ensure that research activities carried out by its staff are ethical and conform to modern, international standards of biosafety.**

4.6   Professional Development for Research

The CAS Strategic Plan recommends five actions to achieve "appropriate, enriching professional development opportunities" and "an applied research capacity within each centre" (Portfolio, p.42). The Panel noted that CAS Sur has attempted to address these issues by appointing an Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Research and a Head of the newly formed Scientific Research Department. The Panel encourages this department to implement its action plan, such

as organising workshops to help staff develop research skills and, with other academic departments, put in place a mentoring scheme whereby experienced staff can share areas of good practice with less experienced members.

The Panel is pleased to note that the College has some on-line research databases, but would encourage CAS Sur to invest more in research journals and other references, particularly as these are becoming more readily available in on-line formats. The Panel acknowledges that CAS Sur has supported staff to gain PhDs at other institutions and suggests that, as part of its Strategic Plan, the College develop policies and procedures for incentives, such as promotion opportunities and lower teaching loads, to encourage staff to engage in research.

4.7   Research Commercialisation

There is no specification for research commercialisation in the Strategic Plan. The Panel does not view this aspect of research as a priority for CAS Sur and recognises that the College has yet to develop this potential (Portfolio, p.43).

4.8   Research – Teaching Nexus

The College's academic programmes include a course titled "Introduction to Research Methods" which is compulsory for all third year students. Academic staff consider this course as a basis for students in their final year projects which have elements of research activity. Nonetheless, the Panel believes that the learning experience of the students at CAS Sur would be further enhanced if their programmes were informed by research and academic staff engaged in scholarly work.

5   INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Strategic Plan for the CAS network has one of its goals to "build partnerships" and recognises that each College is a representative of its community (Portfolio, p.44). The CAS Mission states that programmes should meet national and regional employment needs, which will best be achieved through close involvement with business, industry and government. This Chapter reports the Panel's findings on CAS Sur's activities in industry and community engagement. In addition to planning and management, this includes relationships with industry and employers; professional organisations; other educational providers; alumni; and the community at large.

5.1   Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management

CAS Sur states that it "focuses on the needs and expected benefits from educational industry partnerships" (Portfolio, p.44). The College established the Training and Student Counselling Centre (TSCCC) in 2008 with a main goal of developing relationships with various employers and so provide training and employment opportunities for its graduates. The Panel received positive comments from various sources on the effectiveness of the TSCCC in implementing a training programme that benefited both the students and their employers (see Commendation 2).

Whilst the Panel acknowledges that CAS Sur has been actively engaged with industry through the TSCCC and in some community projects, the College is encouraged to further strengthen its relationship with employers, relevant professions and the community at large. More systematic mechanisms are needed for planning, implementing, and evaluating these activities. Currently, some efforts are made in these areas. However, they are on an informal and *ad hoc* basis. The Panel believes that the planning of these activities needs to be systematic and aligned with the College's Strategic Plan (see Recommendation 3).

5.2   Relationships with Industry and Employers

CAS Sur states that it "encourages the building of relationships with industry and employers". The main focus has been the establishment of the TSCCC with its chief goal being to develop relationships with the private sector and other employers (Portfolio, p.44). The Panel was informed that employers valued the students who joined for job training and also those who have been involved in campaigns, such as the campaign to increase cancer awareness. The Panel noted that there was a lack of funds for major initiatives but the College supports activities that involve students and local employers in health and other campaigns.

Whilst the Panel acknowledges the College's efforts in this area, it was concerned that many of the relationships with industry and employers were informal. The Panel believes that CAS Sur would benefit from formalising its communication channels with industry and employers, for example through an industry advisory committee. This could be a forum to provide input into the curriculum, support student work placements and provide feedback on the performance of graduates (the need to develop a mechanism for tracking graduates has already been identified in Recommendation 11).

> **Recommendation 14**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement a formal mechanism to provide industry input into the curriculum, including the monitoring of graduates' acquisition of graduate attributes, and the evaluation of their performance.**

5.3   *Relationships with Professions*

The College recognises the need to build relationships with the relevant professions (Portfolio, p.45). So far this has only been in academic partnership programmes in the Information Technology (IT) field, namely through becoming a Microsoft IT Academy, an Oracle Academy and an Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3) Centre. The Panel encourages the College to consider further the value and usefulness of relevant professional bodies in terms of membership, accreditation and benchmarking for programme development and review.

5.4   *Relationships with Other Education Providers*

The Panel learned that CAS Sur has relationships with other local education providers and elsewhere in Oman. An important example was the partnership with Sultan Qaboos University for development and implementation of the Applied Biotechnology degree (Portfolio, pp.45-46). As has already been noted (Section 1.4), when the institution became a College of Applied Sciences, the curricula for programmes were supplied by a consortium of institutions from New Zealand, New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC), which also provided quality assurance for the programmes. This association has now ended and the Panel heard that the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is investigating the establishment of relationships with other institutions to replace NZTEC. The Panel also noted that at present the College has no mechanism for the formal benchmarking of academic standards (see Section 2.2).

CAS Sur has formal connections with the other colleges within the CAS network through the Academic Council (AC) on which all Deans sit and through the monthly meetings of the HoDs with the Programme Directors. The Panel was informed that good practice in one college is shared with others through the AC although the Panel was unable to find evidence of this during its visit. As stated earlier (Section 1.2), the Board of Trustees (BoT) has four external members who are informed about and familiar with relevant programmes of other institutions. The Dean of CAS Sur is also a member of the BoT of A'Sharqiya University (Portfolio, p.45). The Panel was encouraged to learn that, as part of its outreach activities, CAS Sur has developed relationships with Sur University College, Sur Nursing Institute, the Ibra College of Technology and other educational institutions in the area (Portfolio, pp.45-46). The Panel encourages the College to further build on these linkages

5.5   *Relationships with Alumni*

While the College states that "many alumni do indeed keep in contact with the TSCCC to exchange recent news about themselves and their colleagues" (Portfolio, p.46), there is no formal alumni association. The Panel found that while graduates can be a very effective resource for publicising the College and its work in the local community and throughout Oman, they are currently not as engaged as they might be. Graduates interviewed by the Panel members had been contacted through their place of work rather than directly, indicating that the alumni database is incomplete. The Panel was informed that the MoHE is working on a central database to include all the CAS students from admission to graduation (Portfolio, p.46). The Panel believes that a formal mechanism for tracking its graduates would be of benefit to the College (see Recommendation 11).

5.6   *Relationships with the Community at Large*

CAS Sur is involved with the local community, for example through visits to secondary schools, providing access to the auditorium for local businesses, and by holding a gathering of the community, including parents, to publicise the programmes which CAS Sur offers (Portfolio, p.47). The Panel learned that the College's plans for greater community engagement are hindered by the lack of resources, particularly financial, as there is a limited budget from the MoHE to support local activities.

The Panel learned, during student interviews, that students had been involved with local businesses in several campaigns as mentioned earlier to raise awareness in the community on issues such as cancer health concerns. Generally, however, there was little evidence to suggest that there is much engagement with the local community. This is an issue the College needs to address if it is to meet its strategic objectives in this area.

6   ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Academic support services at CAS Sur are located in the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) and the Admissions and Registration Centre (ARC). This Chapter reflects the Panel's findings in the areas of academic support services, including planning and management; registry; Library; information and learning technology services; academic advising; student learning support; and teaching resources.

6.1   *Academic Support Services Planning & Management*

The student services offered through the LRC are determined by the CAS Executive Bylaw, the Ministerial decree pertaining to the organising of the academic support centres in CAS as well as the annual plan (Portfolio, p.48). The ARC's main functions are to oversee committees that are involved in the preparation of curriculum plans, planning related to the number of academic staff needed for each academic department and the preparation of statistics related to student registration and admission to the College. In its Strategic Plan, the CAS network has adopted a strategy to "Continually develop all LRCs as state-of-the-art learning facilities". To do so, the College is expected to conduct a critical review of its LRCs and based on that develop a plan in order for the LRC to be state-of-the-art along with an effective library management system. The College's Annual Plan (as stated in section 1.6) is rather a "to do" list of activities for managing the LRC with no clear link to the College's Strategic Plan or the requirements of the academic activities within the College. The Panel did not see evidence of a mechanism to review and evaluate the academic support services.

> **Recommendation 15**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in consultation with the Ministry of Higher Education, review the effectiveness of its current academic support resources and teaching resources, including library and IT provision, in alignment with the College's strategic objectives and its academic requirements.**

6.2   *Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

The College, together with the Student Services Centre at the Directorial General of CAS in the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), review the admission requirements for programmes, after which the latter sends the agreed-upon criteria to the Higher Education Admissions Centre of the MoHE. The Panel noted that there is a pre-determined quota that determines the admission of male and female students. The current ratio is around 60 males to 40 females. However, if the male quota is not reached, then more females can be admitted. This, the Panel was informed, was the reason behind the drop in new male student entry in the last few years.

The ARC has been upgraded from manual to on-line registration, and this has resulted in faster enrolment processes, although the overall internet speed appears to remain problematic. It has also introduced a two-phase registration process that includes consultation with the academic advisors (see Section 6.5). Phase one of the process entails a one-on-one session with the academic advisor during which the student receives a list of suggested courses based on his/her study plan. This is followed by phase two of the on-line registration process (Phase two), during which students register for the courses chosen in consultation with their advisors (Portfolio, p.50).

The ARC is responsible for executing the Centre's Annual Plan (Portfolio, p.55), and to do this it mainly utilises its Student Information System (SIS), which was officially launched in 2006. The

Panel had concerns regarding the College's limited access to information from the MoHE which, according to CAS Sur, hinders the College's abilities to properly plan its services. It noted the problems facing the College as a result of this shortcoming in terms of communication with the MoHE including in relation to operational matters such as the late receipt of course codes and the absence of essential information in the Academic Regulations (Portfolio, p.55). Consequently, the Panel is of the view that the College's communications with the MoHE should undergo a review.

> **Recommendation 16**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur review its communication mechanisms with the Ministry of Higher Education in order to facilitate full and up to date access to the information needed by the College to carry out its activities.**

6.3   Library

The Library is located in the LRC and covers an area of 900 square meters. It is open from Saturday to Tuesday from 8.00am to 8.00pm and on Wednesdays from 8.00am to 4.00pm. The Library holds a significant number of resources that date back to its time as a College of Education (pre-2006). The Panel also noted the self-borrowing programme ("Virtua") initiated by the LRC, as well as the electronic databases like Ebrary and EBSCO through which more than eight thousand journals are available.

The Panel toured the Library facilities and found that there were a limited number of English books on the shelves relating to the two main programmes offered, Information Technology and Communication. During the meeting with staff, the Panel was informed that there is currently a greater demand for on-line resources than for printed books. The Panel is of the view that the College needs to monitor and evaluate the students' utilisation of the Library resources, both electronic and hard copies, to achieve informed decision-making (See Recommendation 15).

6.4   Information and Learning Technology Services

CAS Sur states that its website is the main portal for communication with its community and institutions and also has a campus-wide email system (Portfolio, pp.51-52). The College claims that these "resources facilitate and accelerate the learning process, strengthen communication between students and teachers, and increase cooperation and sharing of information across the board" (Portfolio, p.52).

The Blackboard platform, which is centralised at MoHE, is used to underpin the learning experience for students. Although the package has proven to be a useful supporting tool, the Panel was informed that staff members at CAS Sur have shown a reluctance to use it as the main control is centrally placed within the MoHE. CAS Sur has not been given full access to manage it at College-level. This centralisation is claimed to have been the main reason for many shortcomings in deploying the full service to students. The College points out that "Its mechanisms for providing information for students and staff in the College were unwieldy and inefficient for staff" (Portfolio, p.80). The Panel agrees with the College that some kind of an acceptable level of autonomy would be useful for CAS Sur when providing certain academic tools like Blackboard. Moreover, the slowness of the Internet speed provided on-campus has discouraged the utilisation of the limited access provided to the College; such as enabling the faculty members to upload learning materials and students to access these materials and/or upload their assignments. The College recognises that the slowness of the internet is an issue and this was mentioned several times during the Panel's interview sessions with staff and students. In its review of its LRC, the College needs to pay particular attention to the internet speed and the effectiveness of the Blackboard platform as a learning resource (see Recommendation 15).

The Panel was also informed that the female students were hampered in their efforts to study in the hostels, mainly due to the fact that there were no wi-fi facilities there. This is addressed in Section 7.7.

6.5   Academic Advising

The College states that it seeks to improve students' course selection, support, and remediation through academic advising (Portfolio, p.52). This includes providing students with information during induction week, providing access to downloadable study plans from the CAS website, sending lists of students to academic departments, and assigning each student to an academic advisor. This information is then sent to the ARC who monitors student performance, and identifies at-risk and under-prepared students (Portfolio, p.53).

The Panel noted the relatively high levels of students' dissatisfaction with academic advising in student survey results which the College recognised (Portfolio, p.53). To improve the academic advising provided to the students, CAS Sur has restructured the student registration process into two phases (see Section 6.2). This is to encourage communication between students and their academic advisors. The new process appears to be addressing the problems with the previous system, including the early identification of at-risk students. The Panel established that academic advisors could also personally support a student allocated to them, and this might have happened when social problems emerged. The Panel was, however, concerned about the high load for some academic advisors, with the ratio of students to academic advisors ranging from 1:11 to 1:35. The Panel believes that CAS Sur needs to develop further a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its academic advising system. One of the possibilities the College is working on with the Directorate General is providing advisors with access to the SIS so that they can obtain their advisees' academic and personal information on the SIS.

> **Affirmation 5**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that that there is a need to review the student advisory system to improve its effectiveness and supports the efforts of the College to address this issue.**

6.6   Student Learning Support

The Strategic Plan "emphasises study skills resources for all students to assist them in meeting their educational goals". The College claims that this is achieved through assisting students in mastering of e-learning and providing learning tools such as Photoshop, digital photography and computer basics (Portfolio, p.53). The Learning Technology Centre was also established with the aim of supporting student learning. However, this Centre was not operational at the time of the audit visit and the College did not have a timeline to when it is expected to be operational. Moreover, the Panel found no evidence of a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the student learning support; a matter that needs to be addressed.

> **Recommendation 17**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement a formal process to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the student learning support it provides.**

The Panel noted that the College lacks formal plans for identifying its precise need for computer specialist nor did it find evidence of proper training plans of its currently employed specialist. Whilst CAS Sur identifies this shortage (Portfolio, p.55), it did not provide an action plan on how this will be addressed.

6.7   *Teaching Resources*

Classrooms and laboratories are equipped with LCD projectors, while there are Smartboards in some classrooms. There are 15 computer laboratories, each equipped with between 30 to 40 computers (Portfolio, p.54), in addition to two open-access laboratories. CAS Sur indicates that some of the departments utilise field trips as a resource to enrich students' learning experiences; particularly in relation to the practical aspects of these programmes, and that the College is planning to increase the number of field trips undertaken (Portfolio, p.54). The Panel encourages the College to clearly plan these field trips and assess their effectiveness in contributing to the attainment of the relevant graduate attributes.

7   STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

According to the CAS Strategic Plan "student learning is at the heart of CAS and all college activities and services should be geared to support students and advance their learning" (Strategic Plan, p.31). This Chapter sets out the Panel's findings in the areas of students and student support services, including planning and management, CAS Sur student profile, student satisfaction and climate, student behaviour, career and employment services, student finances, accommodation, catering and transport, medical and counselling services, international student services, and social and recreational facilities.

7.1   *Students and Student Support Services Planning & Management*

The Assistant Dean for Academic Support Affairs at CAS Sur is responsible for Student Support Services, which comprises the Admission and Registration Centre (ARC), the Learning Technology Centre (LTC), the Student Services Centre (SSC), the Administrative and Financial Affairs Office (AFAO) and the Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre (TSCCC).

The TSCCC has three areas of focus: student work placements, career counselling and graduate tracking (Portfolio, p.56), and the Panel's comments regarding each of these has been covered in this Report (see Sections 2.7, 5.1 and 7.5). The College states that student activity committee of the SSC conducts its activities in line with CAS Sur Annual Plan, while the AFAO is responsible for administering procedures related to the disbursement of students' monthly allowances and tickets (Portfolio, p.56). However, the Panel found no evidence of an overarching, coordinated approach to the planning of student support services. As noted in Recommendation 3, the College needs to review its approach to operational planning in all its activity areas in order to support the achievement of its strategic objectives.

7.2   *Student Profile*

In the academic year 2011-2012 there were 1,038 students enrolled at CAS Sur, of which 59.5% were males and 40.5% were females. Almost one third of the student population was enrolled on the Foundation Programme (30%), while the remaining 70% was spread over the first, second, third and fourth year student cohorts. The Panel noted that there has been an increase in the number of female students and a drop in the number of male students. When this was further explored, it was found that this is mainly due to the fact that a number of male applicants do not meet the minimum entry criteria and as a result, the additional available places are given to female students (see Section 6.2).

Notwithstanding the progress achieved through the development of the Student Information System (see Section 6.2), the Panel noted the absence of important statistics relating to students. The College has identified these shortages and has submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Higehr Education (MoHE) and the DG regarding additions to the database that will enable the generation of crucial statistical reports; an academic advising webpage; and a website whereby students will be able to access their study plans (Portfolio, p.58). The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area.

> **Affirmation 6**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that there is a need to improve the collection and analysis of statistical data on students and supports the College's efforts to do so.**

7.3   *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

CAS Sur states that it "is working hard to satisfy students and to provide them with a positive learning environment" (Portfolio, p.58). The College aims to measure student satisfaction and receive their feedback through the Student Council, the Student Grievance Form on the final exam result, and the open meetings between the Dean/HoD, student groups or individuals (Portfolio, p.58). The Student Council is formed at the beginning of each academic year and is chaired by the Dean. The Student Council meets once a semester. The College is encouraged to develop a mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of this body in terms of addressing student-related matters.

CAS Sur states that while there is a student appeal process in place for appeals against a final grade, the College until recently did not have a clear complaints process for a student to lodge a grievance (for example, in cases of harassment) (Portfolio, p.24). As has been previously mentioned (see Section 1.11), CAS Sur is in the process of reviewing and formalising this process (Affirmation 2). While the College is making an effort to use surveys to monitor student satisfaction, the Panel was also concerned that student feedback is not being systematically addressed at CAS Sur. While the College recognises this (Portfolio, p.58), the Panel did not find evidence to suggest that more regular and comprehensive surveys are being implemented and students are not being informed of actions taken in response to their comments. This is an area the College needs to address.

> **Recommendation 18**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement a regular and systematic student satisfaction survey for all aspects of services provided and inform relevant stakeholders, including students, of the outcome of these surveys, as well as develop mechanism to address these outcomes.**

7.4   *Student Behaviour*

The CAS Executive Bylaw sets out rules, regulations, norms and recognised traditions for student behaviour, and these are explained to students during orientation and are provided in the Student Handbook. Any breaches of conduct are referred to the Assistant Dean for Academic Support Affairs who chairs the Student Accountability Committee (Portfolio, p.59).

Students who do not attend at least 80% of their classes are not allowed to sit the final examinations, and the Panel noted that the number of students who were not allowed to sit their finals increased from the academic year 2009–2010 to the academic year 2010–011 (Portfolio, p.60). The Panel learned that the College sends warning letters to the students who have been repeatedly absent although there is no evidence to support that this measure is effective in reducing absenteeism. The Panel also noted that there was an increase in the number of cheating cases during examination from eight in the academic year 2009-2010 to 25 cases in the academic year 2010-2011 (Portfolio, p.60). But the presented analysis through the Portfolio and the discussions during interview sessions did not provide clear evidence if this was due to changes in students' behaviour or due to strengthening the College's invigilation system (see Section 2.9). The College has identified the need to implement more concrete steps towards resolving this, such as posting Examination Rules and Regulations on the doors of examination halls (Portfolio, p.60). The Panel is of the view that, in its attempt to address the issues of cheating and absenteeism, CAS Sur needs to develop an action plan that would diagnose the problem and clearly specify how to deal with these issues and how to measure the effectiveness of its plan.

> **Affirmation 7**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that there is a need to take steps to decrease**

absenteeism and cheating in exams, and supports its efforts to introduce mechanisms to address these issues.

7.5   Career and Employment Services

The TSCCC provides students with workshops to prepare them for the job market. This covers the process of preparing CVs and job applications as well as workshops for developing interview skills.   The TSCCC also organises career fairs where potential employers are able to meet students, and it coordinates the process of summer work placements and internships for senior students in cooperation with different organisations. To achieve this, the Centre has built strong relationships with regional organisations, for example Oman LNG and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Panel identified the College's development and implementation of an effective system for student work placements as an area of strength (see Commendation 2).

The Panel noted that the CAS Sur acknowledges the importance of creating a robust graduate tracking system, but could not corroborate claims that the College regularly contact its graduates in order to keep their information updated regarding whether they are employed or still seeking employment (see Recommendation 11).

7.6   Student Finances

In terms of the CAS Executive Bylaw, students living more than 50km from the College receive financial support in the form of a monthly living allowance, travel stipend and a range of activities. The Panel did not explore this area.

7.7   Accommodation, Catering and Transport

CAS Sur grants a monthly allowance to assist male students who live more than 50km away from the College campus, and is one of the three Colleges within the CAS network that provides hostel accommodation for its female students. The Panel heard that as a result of the increase in the number of female students at the College, there is a problem with overcrowding in the female hostel dormitories. Moreover, the College has identified that there are communication difficulties and an absence of wi-fi (Section 6.4) associated with the fact that female hostels are located at some distance from the campus and from one another (Portfolio, p.63). The Panel urges CAS Sur to develop and execute a timely plan to address the shortage of female accommodation and the necessity to provide equal access to technology which facilitate student learning.

> **Recommendation 19**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur address shortages of the female hostels and ensure that they are fit for purpose for students such as through the provision of internet facilities to support student learning off campus.**

The Panel also heard that there were serious concerns among students regarding the hygiene practices at the student cafe on campus, a matter that the College needs to consider as part of its approach to monitoring student satisfaction and responding to issues raised (see Recommendation 18).

7.8   Medical and Counselling Facilities

In the absence of a student counselling department, the SSC undertakes the non-academic counselling role.   The Panel noted that a Ministerial Decision has been passed for the establishment of a Student Counselling Department on the CAS Sur campus, but there does not seem to be an identified date from the MoHE for the launch of this department.

At the time of the audit visit there were first aid boxes provided in the female dormitories, and a 24-hour transportation service was available to transport students from the campus to the nearby hospital in cases of emergency. There is no medical centre on campus, although student feedback indicates a strong demand for this. The Panel was informed that the College is currently liaising with the Ministry of Health in order to establish a clinic on site.

> **Recommendation 20**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, address the lack of appropriate on-campus medical care services and first aid care and set a timeline for the establishment of the new counselling department.**

The need to develop and implement an effective health and safety policy and related matters is discussed in Section 1.12.

7.9   *International Student Services*

Of the 1,038 students enrolled at CAS Sur in the academic year 2011–2012, only 1.1% were international students who are residents of Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf area and are Arabic Speakers (Portfolio, p.57). This area was not explored by the Panel.

7.10   *Social and Recreational Services and Facilities*

The SSC has oversight over the social and recreational facilities at CAS Sur. The Panel found that there are very few organised activities either on campus or in the female hostels, and the students informed the Panel that they were anxious to see more of these. The College needs to improve the recreational facilities and ensure that all its students are provided with an opportunity to be involved in extra curriculum activities that provides an opportunity to foster their growth and enrich their learning experience.

> **Recommendation 21**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur review the recreational facilities available to its students in order to support the enhancement of the student learning experience.**

8   STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

According to the terms of Article 66 of the Executive Bylaw, staff and staff support services for all the CAS institutions, including CAS Sur, are managed centrally by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). All staffing requests are, therefore, dealt with at Ministry level. In effect, this means that little human resource planning and management is conducted at the CAS Sur campus. Exceptions to this are for local Omani staff members who fill non-academic vacancies and go through on-the-job training sessions with their departments (Portfolio, p.65).   This Chapter reflects the Panel's findings in the area of Human Resources (HR) and related issues at CAS Sur, including HR planning and management; staff profile; recruitment and selection; induction; professional development; performance planning and review; promotion and other incentives; severance; staff organisational climate and retention; and Omanisation.

8.1   Human Resources Planning & Management

CAS Sur has an HR Department that liaises between the College and the MoHE. CAS Sur states that it does "minimal to no HR planning management" (Portfolio, p.65), and that this hampers its efforts to ensure that it has sufficient qualified staff. Although the College is given the opportunity to identify its needs for academic and administrative staff in terms of numbers and type, the CAS Executive Bylaw sets out a centralised process for hiring new staff where short-listing of candidates, interviews, selecting and hiring of staff is done by MoHE. The Panel is of the view that the College's senior management should be more involved in strategic HR planning. It also considers that this effort should be guided by an action plan to develop effective mechanisms for acquiring the services of well-qualified staff, and maintaining their knowledge and proficiency in accordance with the College Vision, Mission, and values statements (see Section 8.3). Certain aspects of recruitment and selection, if delegated to CAS Sur, could have a positive impact in the academic environment of the College.

> **Recommendation 22**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur develop and implement a human resources plan in line with the strategic objectives of the College, which includes developing mechanisms for the involvement of relevant staff in the selection and recruitment process.**

8.2   Staff Profile

The total number of staff at CAS Sur is 183, of whom 95 are in administration and 88 are academics (Portfolio, p.67). The gender distribution among staff is more balanced in administrative departments than in the academic departments, where the overwhelming majority are male. Similarly, the percentage of Omani staff in academic departments is low compared with the administrative and finance departments. The College is of the view that its level of Omanisation in the administrative departments reflects "the most direct implementation of the Omanisation Policy" while the large component of expatriate staff in the academic departments is "in accordance with DG of CAS recruitment policy" (Portfolio, p.67). However, the Panel considers that the College, in conjunction with the MoHE, needs to put stronger efforts towards Omanising its academic staff to achieve a more balanced level of local and international staff (see Section 8.10).

8.3   Recruitment and Selection

CAS Sur has identified three stages in its recruitment and selection process (Portfolio, p.69). Firstly, the pre-recruitment stage, where Heads of Department (HoDs) at the College assess their

staffing needs at the end of each year, is conducted in collaboration with the College administrators and reflects projected teaching hours for all programmes and the number of departing staff. Secondly, the DG's office and the MoHE's Department for Administration and Financial Affairs set up committees for the task of advertising locally and internationally, as well as through the MoHE website. Once applications are received, a committee carries out the process of shortlisting qualified candidates. The committee comprises of selected staff from the MoHE, heads of relevant departments as well as related Programme Directors (PDs). Thirdly, the short-listed candidates are filtered out through interviews carried out by a selection committee comprising of PDs and selected staff from the MoHE.

The College has stated that in some cases, new academic staff for the English department are recruited through a local agency (Portfolio, p.71), but also through the MoHE. The Panel understands the need to have such a systematic and centralised mechanism of recruitment by MoHE, but believes that staff involved with HR at CAS Sur and the concerned departments should be given more autonomy in the selection process, for example Heads of HR and academic departments join in the interview process. This may enable the College to have a coherent level of staff academic quality in the departments as well as ownership of decisions to hire particular staff (see Recommendation 22).

8.4   Induction

New appointees for CAS Sur from outside Oman are initially met by a designated MoHE staff member when they first arrive in Muscat (Portfolio, p.71). They are provided with a staff orientation handbook and placed in temporary accommodation. The Panel noted the informal induction process carried out by the College, and during interviews with the Panel, staff expressed satisfaction with the induction process. However, the College has identified the need to formalise its induction process and is currently working on such a policy. The Panel agrees with the College that the development and implementation of such a policy on induction is required.

> **Affirmation 8**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Sur that there is a need to develop and implement a formal staff induction system, and supports its efforts in addressing the gap.**

8.5   Professional Development

CAS Sur states that it does not have a local professional development programme for its staff (Portfolio, p.73), and this is clearly an issue that negatively impacts the quality of teaching. This is especially evident in cases of staff members who were part of the College when CAS Sur was an educational college and the medium of teaching and communication was Arabic. The Panel found no evidence of development plans or activities to prepare the staff for work and expectations of the present CAS network. The Panel also established that the current appraisal system does not have a link to any staff professional development activities.

The Panel is of the view that it is crucial for the College to have a clear plan for a systematic professional development process that will engage staff, to enhance their abilities and knowledge and hence, better prepare them to conduct their duties in a professional and qualified manner. This is particularly the case for staff in technical areas (such as computing and the Library) where the Panel believes that given the applied nature of the College, staff are under pressure to advance themselves in an ever changing environment and to provide the necessary support for the College. Moreover, any staff development plan should include all administrative staff, and also the senior management staff to ensure the overall effectiveness of the College's activities (see Recommendation 2). The Panel urges CAS Sur to develop a formal staff development plan that is locally managed and informed by the outcome of the staff appraisals.

Recommendation 23

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur establish a mechanism (such as through a professional development unit) to oversee staff professional development and link it to the staff appraisal scheme.

8.6   *Performance Planning and Review*

CAS Sur indicated that it has a staff appraisal scheme in which its staff are fairly evaluated (Portfolio, p.73). This system consists of the general MoHE "performance report" prepared by the staff member's supervisor. The College also indicated that for academic staff the appraisal scheme also involves student feedback as well as peer review monitoring (Portfolio, p.73). These reports are passed to the Dean for ratification. Noting the existence of the performance reports, the Panel found that while there are isolated attempts to have a peer review process and to collect student feedback within some departments, this is not applicable across all academic departments. Moreover, the Panel did not see evidence of a formal appraisal scheme that uses student feedback and peer review monitoring outcomes in a consistent manner. More importantly, feedback from the yearly performance report is not shared with the staff concerned. The Panel recommends that CAS Sur review its appraisal process, and share the outcome with the concerned staff.

Recommendation 24

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review its appraisal scheme and processes to ensure that it is effective and that outcomes are shared with the individual concerned.

8.7   *Promotion and Other Incentives*

Promotion procedures in CAS Sur are currently implemented using the "new regulations" guidelines (Portfolio, p.74), where all staff who are identified by the College as performing in a satisfactory manner are considered by the Ministry of Civil Service for promotion and annual salary increment. This system does not distinguish between the basis for academic staff promotion from that for administrative staff. The Panel learned that the MoHE has set new academic promotion guidelines. The Panel studied these guidelines and found them to be unclear and do not fit international standards and may therefore account for the fact that "no faculty member has so far been promoted" at CAS Sur (Portfolio, p.75). The Panel encourages CAS Sur, in conjunction with the MoHE, to develop and implement a clear and fair academic promotion mechanism that is in line with international good practice. The College should also work towards establishing an incentive programme in which highly performing staff are recognised and appropriately rewarded.

8.8   *Severance*

CAS Sur identifies Article 188 of its Executive Bylaw as the main guide for implementing its severance policy (Portfolio, p.75). Other articles (namely 3 and 5) are also used in relation to terminating an employee's contract, including the recognition of mutual consent between the College and the departing staff member. Although the College feels that "employees are left with uncertainty regarding the formula whereby severance is to be calculated", the Panel found no evidence to support such a claim as no survey is conducted for exiting staff and therefore no statistics are available. The Panel believes that the College should conduct exit surveys with departing staff so that it can gather important data (see Recommendation 25).

8.9   *Staff Organisational Climate and Retention*

CAS Sur acknowledges its shortcomings in collecting data regarding the level of satisfaction of its employees (Portfolio, p.77). The College identifies this as a main reason for its lack of knowledge of staff organisational climate and retention. The Panel believes that while this may be the case, staff at CAS Sur stated they have great respect for their colleagues and also expressed their satisfaction with the environment in the College during the interview sessions. To remedy the gap in systematic knowledge of the organisational climate and retention issues, the Panel considers that the College administration should set a clear plan in place to collect data from staff through staff satisfaction and staff exit surveys for departing staff. This will provide information to hence improve its staff retention rate. The Panel notes the College acknowledgement of the importance of such data but it did not see evidence indicating that the College has started to address this issue

> **Recommendation 25**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur conduct staff satisfaction surveys in addition to exit surveys for departing staff so that it can gather important data on staff satisfaction and hence improve its staff retention.**

Also, working in conjunction with the MoHE, the College should work towards introducing a policy to address staff matters and a code of conduct.

8.10   *Omanisation*

While CAS Sur has been successful in Omanising most of its administrative positions, it falls behind in placing Omanis in academic positions, as these account for only 13% of the total number of faculty members (Portfolio, p.77). The CAS network Strategic Plan states the need to "*Develop and implement an effective academic recruitment plan based on the Environmental Plan whilst ensuring realistic Omanisation targets are set and met*". The Panel concurs that for the College to progress and grow, it must attract local faculty members where cultural coherence between staff and students enriches the learning experience. Therefore, the Panel recommends that rigorous efforts be directed towards employing more Omanis.

> **Recommendation 26**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur implement a rigorous plan towards the Omanisation of its academic staff profile.**

9   GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

"Commitment to students" is one of CAS network values, while "Excellence to achieve the highest audited standards in teaching quality is another" (Portfolio, p.14). These values, according to the College, contribute positively towards meeting its obligations stated in its Vision and Mission statements. This Chapter sets out the Panel's findings in the areas of general support services and facilities planning and management; public relations and marketing; communication services; and facilities management.

9.1   *General Support Services and Facilities Planning & Management*

CAS Sur is currently working on a number of projects that it claims will improve its support services and facilities. These projects include the new Deanship building as well as the Learning Technology Centre (LTC) (Portfolio, p.78). Although the Panel supports such efforts, it notes that work had been slow due to various contractual issues some of which have required a long time to resolve. The delay, especially with regard to the LTC, has made it hard for the technical support staff to provide quality services to faculty and students owing to inadequate computing power and internet bandwidth. CAS Sur provides an Internet service that utilises an eight Mbps line but the College has plans to upgrade to 16 Mbps once the move to its new LTC building is achieved. The Panel acknowledges the College's efforts to improve campus life and existing facilities. However, it believes that more facilities are needed as the College lacks recreational facilities for both students and staff such that students, especially female students, have to be transported from the campus in order to have access to recreational activities (see Recommendation 21).

The Panel recognises that the location of the College has posed problems as on two occasions in recent years it has suffered major flooding with major computing and other facilities rendered useless and subsequently needing to be replaced. This is an issue that needs to be discussed with the MoHE. In the event that the current location continues to serve as the location for CAS Sur, the Panel suggests that all computing and networking equipment in the LTC be placed in higher level floors where they may be protected from any future flooding.

9.2   *Public Relations and Marketing*

CAS Sur states that it "continues to selectively recruit honour roll students, attracting a pool of more competitive and ideal candidates, and to raise the teaching standards and delivery" (Portfolio, p.79). The Panel considered evidence indicating that one of the major obstacles at CAS Sur is the enrolment of low-performing students. The Panel, however, acknowledges the College's efforts in reaching out to its community and marketing the quality of its students through the graduate placement programme linked with the Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre (see Commendation 2). The Panel also agrees with the College that more effective action needs to take place in the area of cooperation with the local community and industry with mutual sharing of resources and consultancy expertise.

9.3   *Communication Services*

CAS Sur provides a number of means of communication for its students and staff. For example, the College provides email accounts, telephone lines, and fax services for its staff (Portfolio, p.80). CAS Sur uses SMS in addition to the above tools to communicate with its students regarding various academic and personal issues. Other means of communication that the College provides for its stakeholders is through the College website. The College acknowledges the lack of efficacy of the website (Portfolio, p.81), but the Panel did not see evidence of a current plan to

address this problem. The Panel urges CAS Sur to improve and update its website so that it provides up to date information and useful functions for the benefit of all College stakeholders.

Recommendation 27

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Sur explore and adopt a mechanism to keep the College's website informative and current.

9.4   *Facilities Management*

The Service Department of CAS Sur supports students and staff by providing, maintaining and managing various College facilities including College landscape, supplies warehouse, transportation, electricity and water, students housing, and fire and safety (Portfolio, p.81). The Panel believes that the College could exert more effort in maintaining its landscape to a higher standard so that the surroundings and the working environment are made safer and more pleasant.

The Panel found no evidence of fire and safety policy or basic guidance in case of an emergency such as information about gathering points, fire drills and so on. The Panel urges the College to develop and implement an effective fire and safety policy, and maintain proper equipment and guidelines for students and staff (see Section 1.12).

APPENDIX A.   AUDIT PANEL

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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.

AC	CAS Academic Council
ADRI	A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising: Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.
AFAO	Administrative and Financial Affairs Office
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.
ARC	Admission and Registration Centre
BoT	CAS Board of Trustees
CAS	College of Applied Sciences http://www.cas.edu.om
CC	College Council
CV	Curriculum Vitae
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.
DG	Director General of the CAS network
Executive Officer	An OAAA staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide professional guidance and support.
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.
FP	Foundation Programme
HEAC	The Higher Education Admission Center
HEI	Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider)
HoD	Head of Department
HR	Human Resources
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
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*.
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LRC	Learning Resource Centre
LTC	Learning Technology Centre
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
NZTEC	New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oaaa.gov.om)

OAAA Board	The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAC	Oman Accreditation Council (became OAAA in 2010)
Panel Chairperson	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member	An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
PD	CAS Programme Director
Portfolio	see *Quality Audit Portfolio*.
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.
Results	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's *approach* and *deployment*.
SIS	Student Information System
SSC	Student Services Centre
System	In this Report, *system* refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.
TSCCC	Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre
Undersecretary	The undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education

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