



Oman Academic
Accreditation Authority

**Report of an Audit of
College of Applied Sciences
Nizwa**

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Audit Report Number 31

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P.O. Box 1255
P.C. 133
Al-Khuwair
Sultanate of Oman
Ph +968 2412 1600
Fax +968 2412 1231
<http://www.oaaa.gov.om>

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OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

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

The Quality Audit commenced with CAS Nizwa 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 15 November 2011.

The OAAA appointed an external Audit Panel (the 'Panel'), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the quality audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 21 December 2011 to consider CAS Nizwa's Portfolio. Following this, the Audit Panel Chairperson's representative and the Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to CAS Nizwa on 28 January 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 Nizwa's activities. No submissions were received.

The audit visit took place over 10 - 14 March 2012. During this time, the Panel spoke with over 100 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 14 March (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.

The Report contains a summary of the Panel's findings, together with formal commendations where good practices have been confirmed, affirmations where CAS Nizwa'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 Nizwa.

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 6 November 2012.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No. 54/2010 to replace the Oman Accreditation Council. Its responsibilities include conducting quality audits of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. For further information, visit the OAAA website (<http://www.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 current 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) Nizwa is one of six Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASs) governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). It was founded in 1990 as an Intermediate Teacher Training College offering teaching diplomas, and later upgraded to a College of Education conferring Bachelor Degrees in Education, the disciplinary focus of the institution shifted to Applied Sciences in 2005, giving rise to CAS Nizwa. The institution operates six academic departments, complemented by four student support centres, with respective department heads that report to two Assistant Deans, each supervised by the College Dean, the nominal head of the institution. The College sits on a 171,285 square-meter campus that encompasses nine buildings and several playing fields for student recreation and enrolled 365 new students during the academic year 2010-11, resulting in a total population of over 1572 students.

CAS colleges share a common Mission, Vision and Strategic Plan with a focus on applied sciences. The colleges are regulated by the same Executive Bylaws and supervised by the Directorate General (DG) of CAS within the MoHE. One of the challenges facing CAS Nizwa is the delays faced by centralised decision-making which can prevent timely execution and completion of operational tasks at the College. The College, in conjunction with the MoHE, also needs to review the delineation of responsibilities for governing academic leadership and management. The Panel found that within CAS Nizwa itself there was a high degree of collegiality amongst staff and a positive spirit of teamwork under a competent management team. These findings were in line with the conclusions of a staff satisfaction survey carried out by the College. CAS Nizwa's efforts to establish a Quality Assurance office were acknowledged by the Panel. Within the CAS network's overall Strategic Plan, CAS Nizwa developed a College-wide Operational Plan for 2010-2011. This plan now needs to be updated and linked to the operational activities in all College departments. The College also needs to develop a systematic process for entity and activity review. In order to ensure the safety of its students and staff on campus, CAS Nizwa needs to implement a regular programme of health and safety audits and a range of appropriate policies that are reviewed and monitored.

CAS Nizwa offers three degree-level programmes in the areas of International Business Administration; Design; and Communication, along with a Foundation Programme. These programmes are delivered through six academic departments. The awards are conferred by the MoHE. The curriculum was developed as part of an affiliation agreement signed between the MoHE and the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC). NZTEC also had some responsibility for providing feedback on quality assurance of the programmes offered. With the NZTEC agreement having come to an end in May 2011, the College now needs to develop and implement mechanisms for the internal and external review of curriculum. Part of this review will need to consider the balance of practice and theory in the context of applied science programmes. The Panel noted that although NZTEC carried out a final review in 2011, by the time of the audit visit, the College management had not seen the report and therefore had not been able to take action in response to the findings. The programmes are overseen by Programme Directors (PDs) at a network level and Course Coordinators within each College. The Panel was informed that the PDs were not involved with central formal decision making bodies, such as the Academic Council, and the College-based Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research had little formal interface with the PDs. This situation needs to be reviewed in order to provide clear academic leadership and

transparent decision-making in CAS Nizwa. The College also needs to review the English level of students and the low progression rate from the Foundation Programme. Although by the time of the audit, the College had only graduated two cohorts of students, CAS Nizwa needs to progress with its plans for a graduate tracking system in order to monitor the employability of its students.

To date, the College's main focus has been on teaching and learning although in its Vision it has aspirations for providing opportunities for applied research. CAS Nizwa has taken steps in this direction through providing funding for scholarly activities. However, its efforts in this area would be more effective if there was clear leadership and planning for research. The College has carried out a number of activities with local industry and employers; this now needs to be formalised, for example through the formation of a local industry advisory group. This may also support the College in finding more opportunities for student work placements. The College is encouraged to move forward with its plans for alumni activities and to take further advantage of being part of a national network of colleges. The College has identified a number of strategies to serve the wider community and these now need to be acted upon.

In terms of academic support services, the College is making improvements such as expanding its electronic resources and has recently installed a digital studio. However, CAS Nizwa needs to ensure that support staff are adequately trained to use and maintain specialised teaching resources. The College's student profile shows a considerable growth in enrollment over the years. This has implications for resources and staffing that need to be reflected in strategic planning. Although the Panel noted that the College had carried out staff and student surveys in developing its self study, these now need to be part of a regular approach to monitoring all areas of the College's activity. Actions taken in response to feedback need to be communicated to the relevant stakeholders. The establishment of a Training and Student Career Counselling Centre is a positive initiative but may only be effective with sufficient resourcing.

Human resources management is regulated centrally through the DG CAS. This is another area where centralised decision-making leads to delays, demonstrated by the number of CAS Nizwa staff in acting positions. The College has plans to improve its staff induction and has developed a Professional Development Programme for staff which has been well received. Professional development opportunities now need to be extended and formalised for administrative staff. The College is also encouraged, in conjunction with the MoHE, to establish a more transparent and consistent approach to performance appraisal. The College has established a well-maintained campus and the Panel supports CAS Nizwa's efforts to raise its profile regionally and nationally.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa for the effective management of its staff, yielding high collegiality among employees and sustaining a positive and supportive working environment..... 13
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa for developing and implementing a system to review and improve its catering facilities. 37
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa for developing and implementing an in-house Professional Development Programme to support academic staff development. 42

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority affirms that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, needs to develop and implement a systematic quality assurance process and supports its efforts in this area through the establishment of its Quality Assurance Unit. 14
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, it needs to review the current funding model to ensure that the available budget meets the operational needs of the College and supports its efforts in this area..... 16
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop and implement a unified policy on plagiarism that is consistently implemented across the College and supports its efforts in this area. 23
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to implement an external examiner system and, in conjunction with Programme Directors and other colleges, to review its approach to monitoring academic standards following the end of the agreement with the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium. 24
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop and implement a systematic approach to gathering employer feedback and establish a database of its graduates in order to track destinations and supports its efforts in this area. 25
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to make efforts to secure further funding/resources for faculty members' research activities and supports its efforts to do so. 28
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop an alumni association and supports its efforts to do so through the building of an alumni database..... 31
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to improve its specialist teaching facilities, such as the digital studio for its Communication programmes and supports its efforts to do so..... 33
9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop its academic advising system so that it is consistently implemented throughout the College and supports its efforts such as through the establishment of the Academic Advisory Committee. 34
10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop its career guidance and employment activities and supports its efforts to expand its capacity in its Training and Student Career Counseling Centre. 36
11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that that it needs to develop on campus medical and counselling facilities and supports its efforts to do so with the assistance of the Ministry of Higher Education. 37
12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to review and improve its recreational facilities such as providing sports facilities for female students..... 38

13.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to further develop its staff induction activities and supports its efforts to establish a consistently delivered formal induction programme.	41
14.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to introduce a comprehensive and more equitable system for promotion and supports its efforts to introduce a new policy.	43
15.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to raise its profile and marketing and recognises its efforts to create the structures to do this.	46
16.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to take steps, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, to ensure that College-wide communications are accessible where appropriate to all staff and students whether English or Arabic speaking and supports its efforts to do so.	47

Summary of Recommendations

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

1.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the relevant bodies at the Ministry of Higher Education, review and clarify the delineation of responsibilities governing academic leadership and management.	12
2.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, examine and take steps to remediate the causes of delays in decision-making that prevent timely execution and completion of operational tasks at the College.	12
3.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education and other stakeholders, develop and implement an action plan in response to the recommendations in the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium Graduate Review Report, particularly in the area of academic leadership.	14
4.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa ensure that its operational planning links clearly to its strategic goals; is fully aligned to resources within a realistic time frame; and is implemented in all areas of activity including research; industry and community engagement; support services; and human resource management.	15
5.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement an institution-level risk management policy and initiate actions to ensure the College is properly protected against events that could compromise its operation or the safeguarding of its physical assets or data.	16
6.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa establish a systematic entity and activity review process to ensure a consistent approach to quality across all its academic and operational domains.	17
7.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa ensure that it operationalises its fire protection system and that appropriate drills and training are carried out.	18

8.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement a health and safety policy and a regular programme of health and safety audits.....	18
9.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, implement plans to review its curricula to ensure an appropriate balance between practice and theory in line with its Mission as a College of Applied Sciences.....	20
10.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Science Nizwa review its current English competency standard for students to enter degree programmes to ensure that it is in line with Oman’s Standards for General Foundation Programmes.....	21
11.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Science Nizwa review its approach to programme delivery to ensure that students have more opportunities for self-directed learning to enable them to attain the full range of graduate attributes.....	22
12.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Science Nizwa review its course evaluation mechanism to ensure that students are fully engaged; actions taken in response to feedback are communicated to students; and that it is used as an effective tool to enhance the quality of teaching.....	22
13.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa provide further support for student work placements to ensure that students have the opportunity to gain practical experience and enhance their employability on graduation.....	23
14.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa review its management information systems to ensure that it has accurate data on student retention and progression across the College and to investigate the reasons for the exceptionally high pass rates for degree programmes.....	25
15.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa review its approach to establishing a research culture in line with its strategic objectives to ensure that research is systematically managed and developed.....	27
16.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement ethics and research policies (e.g. intellectual property rights) to underpin the development of its research culture.....	29
17.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement a systematic approach to its engagement with industry and the community supported by appropriate resources to align with the College’s strategic objectives in this area.....	30
18.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa formalise its relationship with industry and employers, such as through the formation of a local advisory committee.....	30
19.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement a maintenance and replacement plan for its teaching resources.....	34
20.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa respond to student concerns highlighted in the recent student satisfaction	

- survey; ensure that students are informed of changes made in response to their feedback; and introduce a schedule for surveys in order to regularly monitor student satisfaction. 36
21. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, act on and confirm the position reclassifications and conditions for heads of administrative departments holding acting designations and review the classification of technical and professional support staff. 41
22. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review the current professional development opportunities available to administrative staff, acknowledging the changing roles and expectations arising from the move from Colleges of Education to Colleges of Applied Sciences. 42
23. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review its policies on performance appraisal to ensure all staff members receive feedback and that results are linked to professional development planning. 43
24. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa gather regular user feedback on its general support services to enable it to address areas in need of improvement and ensure that feedback is given to staff and students on actions taken. 45

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The College of Applied Sciences (CAS) Nizwa is one of six Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASs) governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Founded in 1990 as an Intermediate Teacher Training College offering teacher diplomas, and later upgraded to a College of Education conferring Bachelor Degrees in Education, the disciplinary focus of the institutions shifted to Applied Sciences in 2005. This conversion is a reflection of the national aspiration to diversify Oman's economy beyond the oil and gas industry and to seize economic opportunities associated with increased globalisation. The institution operates six academic departments along with four student support centres. Each department and support centre head reports to one of the two Assistant Deans, who are supervised by the College Dean, the nominal head of the institution. In addition to the two Assistant Deans responsible for academic departments and student support units, respectively, the Dean is assisted by a Director of Administrative and Financial Affairs (DAFA), who manages the institution's administrative, financial, and human resources. Enrolling 1,572 students during the academic year 2010-11, CAS Nizwa sits on a 171,285 square-meter campus that encompasses nine buildings and several playing fields for student recreation.

This Chapter covers the Audit Panel's findings on institutional governance and management of CAS Nizwa including the stated institutional Mission and Vision for the future; the governance structure; operational management; strategic and operational plans; financial and risk management; management of ministry policies; entity and activity review systems; student grievance process; and the health and safety environment.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

Evolving over several years, CAS Nizwa in collaboration with the other CASs, adopted an institutional Mission statement in 2009 that is anchored in the following:

"[To] provide high-quality programmes which meet national and regional employment needs.... Graduates will possess the knowledge and demonstrate the abilities to engage in their disciplinary fields, and contribute to Oman's economy..." (Portfolio, p.8).

This institutional Mission, common to all colleges in the CAS network, is underpinned by a Vision "[To] aspire to be the leading academic institution in Oman in the field of Applied Sciences" (Portfolio, p.8). CAS Nizwa is also guided by a set of core values that include: a commitment to enhance Omani culture and identity; high standards of teaching; development of a research culture; pursuit of advanced knowledge with practical application; and partnerships with business and industry (Portfolio, p.8).

Given the degree of globalisation in economic activity and mounting interdependence both within and across regions of the world, CAS Nizwa could consider incorporating in its institutional Vision the goal to prepare students to respond to the changing environment. This would be in line with its stated graduate attribute to "develop a sense of global citizenship" (see Section 2.1). While the Panel agreed that the Mission and Vision seem appropriate for CAS Nizwa at this stage of its development, the College needs to ensure that it produces graduates who are required by and qualified for the labour market both locally and nationally.

1.2 *Governance*

In relation to governance, the CAS colleges have a common Strategic Plan (see Section 1.5) which intends to align "governance and management structure with the institutional mission" (Goal 1) and to "achieve sustainable operational funding" (Goal 6) (Strategic Plan, pp.15-16).

Reviewing the Strategic Plan and the Executive Bylaw of Royal Decree 62/2007 regulating CAS institutions, the Panel noted that CAS Nizwa's capacity to accomplish these two strategic goals (i.e. alignment of the governance/management with Mission, and sustainable funding) is restricted by the MoHE bylaws governing the operation of CAS Nizwa. Operating under the "direct supervision" of the Director General of CAS system (DG-CAS), the Panel was informed that CAS Nizwa is subject to review and approval of academic matters (such as programmes offered or abolished, admission plan, managing student and faculty issues) by the Academic Council.

The supreme academic body of the CAS system, the Academic Council comprises all CAS Deans, select faculty, the DG-CAS, and the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education as Chair (Executive Bylaw of Royal Decree 62/2007, pp.18-19; Portfolio, p.10). However, only the DG-CAS can review Deans' recommendations before passing them on to the Academic Council, and report on the performance of each CAS to the Undersecretary of MoHE (Executive Bylaw of Royal Decree 62/2007, pp.20-21). Reflecting on interviews with CAS Nizwa staff, the Panel found that the line management structure at MoHE between the Academic Council and the DG-CAS results in overlapping responsibilities for approval and implementation of budget and academic matters of CAS Nizwa. According to the organisational chart of the Directorate General of CAS, both the Academic Council and the DG-CAS have a direct reporting line to the Undersecretary (Portfolio, p.11), although the Undersecretary is the Chair of the Academic Council.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the relevant bodies at the Ministry of Higher Education, review and clarify the delineation of responsibilities governing academic leadership and management.

In meetings with CAS Nizwa staff, the Panel noted delays in the provision of student learning equipment and was told that budget constraints limited the College's ability to address immediate issues (see Section 9.1). Also during these interviews the Panel was informed that frequent turnover of the DG-CAS position complicates effective management of CAS Nizwa (see Section 8.2). The Panel was informed that this has a direct impact on academic programme management, since Programme Directors (PDs) assist the DG-CAS with technical expertise (see Section 1.4). If that technical input does not percolate up to the Academic Council via the DG-CAS as a result of personnel changes, it affects the flow of information to enable decisions governing academic matters at the level of each institution in the CAS network.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, examine and take steps to remediate the causes of delays in decision-making that prevent timely execution and completion of operational tasks at the College.

1.3 Management

While the policies governing the operation of CAS Nizwa are developed and approved by the MoHE through the Board of Trustees (BoT) and the Academic Council, day-to-day operation of the institution resides with the Dean, the Assistant Deans, Heads of Department (HoDs), and their teams. Furthermore, the College Council and Department Councils share management responsibilities for the institution. Collectively, they all contribute to the execution of the College's academic, administrative, and financial affairs; and they are responsible for preparing the institution's strategic and operational plans (Portfolio, p.12). To keep staff at all levels of the

academic hierarchy informed, College Council minutes are passed on to HoDs, who share the information with their faculty.

The Panel was able to corroborate statements made by CAS Nizwa (Portfolio, p.13) on the level of staff satisfaction with the management climate and information flow via both verification of survey results (Academic Year 2010/11 Staff Survey, pp.5-7) and through interviews. Survey results indicate that staff overall are satisfied with the turnaround time on material requests, the collegiality between academic and administrative staff, and the level of teamwork and cooperation among colleagues. Overall, the Panel observed a high level of collegiality and teamwork among staff across the campus and found statements on staff management to be consistent with the findings in the staff survey results.

Commendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa for the effective management of its staff, yielding high collegiality among employees and sustaining a positive and supportive working environment.

1.4 *Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance*

In May 2006, the CAS network, represented by the MoHE, entered into a five-year affiliation agreement with the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC) to put in place well established curricula at CAS colleges and to implement a quality assurance process that follows best practices in higher education. The Memorandum of Cooperation between the two sides spelt out the intention for CAS colleges to benefit from NZTEC curricula that define programme structure, student learning outcomes, teaching material (for in-class and online application), assistance with moderation, benchmarking, and evaluation of programmes. Four NZTEC visits verifying moderation, benchmarking, and assessment of student learning were followed by a comprehensive Graduate Review in April 2011 designed to compare student learning outcomes against stated learning objectives for each degree programme. In its review, NZTEC identified the need for the MoHE to take more of a governance and strategic role and delegate greater operational responsibility to the group of colleges for ensuring the quality of academic programmes. The review report was only circulated to College staff at the time of the audit visit and therefore no action plan had been developed in response to the college-level issues that NZTEC had raised. This should now be a priority.

From the Panel's discussion with representatives of the MoHE, the PDs, who oversee programmes across the network, and senior and academic staff at CAS Nizwa, it is evident that the end of the NZTEC agreement requires a number of important issues to be addressed, most notably in the area of assurance of quality and standards. It is evident that the current operational structure gives considerable power over academic quality and standards as well as programme delivery to PDs who see their role as technical advisors to the DG-CAS. However, there is a lack of strategic coordination centrally between the PDs and the academic decision making bodies, most notably in the fact that the PDs are not represented on the Academic Council. The necessary emphasis on maintaining a cross college commonality of programme delivery, quality and standards has tended to place the PDs, working directly with HoDs and course coordinators, in an academic leadership role that excludes the Assistant Dean and the Dean of individual colleges. The Panel was informed that the role of PDs has gradually expanded from a focus on Omanisation and recruitment to a synchronisation of system-wide standards and 'fine-tuning' of degrees and resources to maximise student learning (e.g., introduction of 'problem-based' learning).

The completion of the NZTEC agreement offers an opportunity to consider how senior management at CAS Nizwa can develop an academic leadership role at the College as part of

building local capacity and ensuring the sustainability of internationally credible higher education in the medium and longer term.

Recommendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education and other stakeholders, develop and implement an action plan in response to the recommendations in the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium Graduate Review Report, particularly in the area of academic leadership.

CAS Nizwa recognises the need for greater staffing of its recently established Quality Assurance (QA) Unit. In conjunction with QA staff at the MoHE, the College intends to establish quality assurance processes to ensure high standards after the expiration of the NZTEC cooperation agreement (Portfolio, p.15). To this end, the Panel concurs with CAS Nizwa that there is a need to develop and implement systematic quality assurance processes for its degree programmes and supports its efforts in this area, such as through the establishment of the QA Unit.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority affirms that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, needs to develop and implement a systematic quality assurance process and supports its efforts in this area through the establishment of its Quality Assurance Unit.

1.5 Strategic and Operational Planning

As noted in Section 1.2, the colleges in the CAS network have developed a single, shared Strategic Plan. The latest version of the Strategic Plan is dated 24 October 2010 and is referred to as an 'interim plan', or Phase 1, scheduled to be replaced by a Phase 2 plan (which the Panel was informed was currently being drafted) designed to guide the institution's operations from 2011 to 2015. The Phase 2 Plan will be based on environmental scanning of the needs and challenges as viewed by the College and various stakeholders (e.g. employers, community, staff etc) (Portfolio, pp.15-16). The Strategic Plan lays out in detail the six key strategic goals, which are:

- 1) alignment of governance and management structure with the institutional mission,*
- 2) building an institutional reputation as a valuable contributor to the development of the Omani economy,*
- 3) advancement of student learning,*
- 4) pursuit of academic excellence,*
- 5) building of strategic partnerships, and*
- 6) achieve sustainable operational funding*
(Strategic Plan, pp.15-16).

The translation of the strategic goals into operational tasks is contained in the institution's Operational Plan 2010/2011, a blueprint that specifies a list of strategic actions associated with each strategic goal. Each strategic action lists a corresponding department action, key performance indicator (KPI), progress monitoring regime, resource requirements, responsible person(s) for implementation, and expected timeline (start/end date). The Panel was informed that the production of the Operational Plan was informed by input from all academic and academic support units and put together by the QA coordinator and members of the QA Steering Committee. The Operational Plan is still a 'work in progress', awaiting completion of feedback from academic departments and academic support units in response to the Operational Plan draft

document (Portfolio, pp.16-17). However, as the Operational Plan is dated 2010-2011, a revised version will need to be developed to cover the future implementation of the strategic objectives.

While the Panel found both the Strategic Plan and the Operational Plan to contain a detailed description of each strategic goal, corresponding operational actions, KPIs, and indications of which individuals would be responsible for different areas, most operational actions are incompletely specified. They have no listed timelines, omit how progress would be monitored, and almost all lack information on resource requirements. Therefore the Panel was not able to gather concrete evidence during staff interviews of measurable progress in achieving the strategic goals. Similarly, staff interviews confirmed to the Panel that the College lacks a clear sense of linking operational tasks to strategic goals and measuring successful completion of the former in order to gauge accomplishment of the latter. This is an issue the College needs to address in areas such as industry and community engagement; academic and student support services and in human resource management.

Recommendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa ensure that its operational planning links clearly to its strategic goals; is fully aligned to resources within a realistic time frame; and is implemented in all areas of activity including research; industry and community engagement; support services; and human resource management.

1.6 Financial Management

The financial management of CAS Nizwa is under the operational control of the DAFA and the Director General for Administrative and Financial Affairs at the MoHE (Portfolio, p.17). A non-profit entity, CAS Nizwa depends on government funding as the sole source of income, which is provided through an annual operating budget and also through access to a 5-year development budget. Though the annual budget is prepared by the DAFA, and reviewed by the Dean, its approval rests strictly with the MoHE in accordance with instructions issued by the Ministry of Finance (Portfolio, p.17). With 70% of the operating budget allocated for employee salaries, changes in the annual budget are largely due to changes in staffing and annual increments in salary associated with employee contract duration/seniority. Deviation from the approved budget requires the Dean to petition the MoHE for additional funds. The College states that it recognises the need to align its financial planning with goals set out in its Operational Plan, specifically the need to have a funding model that covers more than just annual increments in staff salary (Portfolio, p.18). The Panel was informed that a proposal on a revised budgeting process had been sent to the MoHE by the College

The Panel echoes the CAS Nizwa position articulated in its Portfolio that its operational budget, which is approved by the MoHE, should reflect both changes in staffing *and* costs associated with activities and services set out in its Operational Plan. Since the operational budget is not formally tied to student enrollment, the Panel was told that emerging needs for more funding to maintain student-learning equipment or to enhance research activities (for both students and staff) have to be met within existing budget allocations. Thus, this rather inflexible approach to budgeting prevents CAS Nizwa from developing the operational agility to effectively carry out tasks to accomplish its strategic goals or to respond to emerging long-term changes in its on-going operations. The Panel was informed that limited funding has affected library resources, student laboratory facilities, and computer software maintenance, or otherwise prevented the timely acquisition of learning resources. The Panel agrees with CAS Nizwa that in a selection of areas of operation the need for more sustained funding is warranted.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, it needs to review the current funding model to ensure that the available budget meets the operational needs of the College and supports its efforts in this area.

1.7 Risk Management

CAS Nizwa recognises it does not yet have a clear institution-level policy in place to govern its risk management. Instead, individual departments and operational units approach risk management on an *ad hoc* basis, although the College states that it has a task force in place to address the need for an institution-wide integrated risk management plan (Portfolio, p.18). One risk may emanate from a shortage of teaching staff due to a large rise in student enrollment. Staff needs are estimated by HoDs on the basis of projected numbers of student applicants (Portfolio, p.18), which in turn is governed by a MoHE-controlled central admission process (for all CASs) that determines how many students are eligible to attend CAS Nizwa. While all students enrolled meet the admission criteria, the level of English mastery among admitted students is a concern, according to documentation submitted to the Panel (see Section 2.3). CAS Nizwa also reports that risk management in the area of IT security and access has been addressed with an expansion of digital subscriber lines at the Learning Resources Centre (LRC), campus-wide wireless internet coverage, and standard anti-virus and firewall programme installation. Student enrollment data are captured by MoHE servers, with daily back-ups run by the MoHE (Portfolio, p.18).

The Panel welcomes the College's identification of the need for an institution-level risk management policy and agrees that this will need to be coordinated with the MoHE for it to be successfully implemented. However, the Panel did not register concrete steps taken by the College to put in place such a policy, followed by operational actions or a task force to support it. The Panel recognises that an integrated institutional risk management approach to ensure adequate instructional resource provisioning requires both accurate student enrollment projections and a commensurate budget plan that is approved by the MoHE. This is an area the College needs to address.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement an institution-level risk management policy and initiate actions to ensure the College is properly protected against events that could compromise its operation or the safeguarding of its physical assets or data.

1.8 Policy Management

As one of six campuses in the CAS system governed by the MoHE, CAS Nizwa is managed by policies and regulations set out by the MoHE in the Ministry Bylaws. These Bylaws cover the College's organisational structure, authority associated with each line management position, and terms of employment. Regulation of academic matters, including student admission, course enrollment, and learning assessment, is the responsibility of the DG-CAS, in cooperation with the six colleges, which issues the Academic Regulation Handbook. Issues outside the scope of MoHE regulations are governed by the policies and regulations of the Ministry of Civil Services (Portfolio, p.19). Complementing these regulatory levels are policies and regulations formulated by College departments and academic support centres to respond to local needs.

Staff and student surveys indicate a general awareness of these policies. The Panel supports the intention of CAS Nizwa to develop a policy bank cataloging the status and issues associated with

each policy document in order to identify potential gaps between policy and institutional regulations. The College is encouraged to now implement this.

1.9 Entity and Activity Review Systems

According to CAS Nizwa, the institution's review system in recent years has been significantly shaped by its conversion from a College of Education to a College of Applied Sciences (Portfolio, pp.19-20). The agreement with NZTEC included regular review visits with major reviews in 2008 and 2010/2011 which resulted in reports that were followed up centrally and at individual college level. CAS Nizwa has followed through with a number of steps in response to recommendations from previous NZTEC reviews, yielding demonstrable improvements in programme quality (e.g., acquisition of e-library resources). The Panel was informed that the College had formed committees to address post-NZTEC programme and curricular quality issues, and some programmes (such as Communication) rely on faculty peer advising to enhance teaching practices. Further, PDs at the MoHE have been tasked with a review of academic standards and curricula for each degree programme with the aim of ensuring a common approach to quality monitoring of academic standards for all CAS institutions.

The Panel was able to confirm through interviews and supporting material submitted, that CAS Nizwa has engaged in a series of review activities to ensure the quality of its academic programmes. However, the information reviewed by the Panel indicated that the level of quality assurance varies significantly between programmes. For example, HoD or peer reviews are not included in the review of all programmes. Forms for course evaluation have been submitted to the HoDs, but the Panel found no evidence to indicate the level of rigour behind the course evaluation process. Similarly, the Panel was presented with forms used in reviews conducted by course coordinators, but neither their findings nor their impact could be ascertained by the Panel.

According to documents submitted, only the English Department has used outside expertise in its review activities. There are plans to use an external examiner system across all programmes which should also provide a review element (see Section 2.8)

While the Panel recognises steps taken by CAS Nizwa to review its academic programmes, CAS Nizwa would benefit from putting in place a systematic process of entity and activity review to ensure quality across all its operational domains (such as academic departments and academic support centres) as well as administrative areas. This would need to be considered as CAS Nizwa embeds the activities of its Quality Assurance Unit (see Affirmation 1).

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa establish a systematic entity and activity review process to ensure a consistent approach to quality across all its academic and operational domains.

1.10 Student Grievance Process

Student interests and concerns are taken up by committees that focus on academic and extra-curricular issues. The Student Council is an "umbrella" body consisting of administration, faculty, and student representatives. Boxes for depositing suggestions and complaints are also positioned around campus to offer students a direct way to voice their opinion, in addition to surveys that gauge students' level of satisfaction with the College (Portfolio, pp. 21-22).

Upon examination of meeting minutes of the Student Council, the Academic Committee, the Extracurricular Committee, the Restaurant Committee, and the Suggestion Boxes Committee, the Panel corroborated the College's description of the mechanisms in place for students to voice

their concerns, suggestions, or level of satisfaction with the College. Results from the student survey suggest that students on average may not have ready access to meet the Dean or Assistant Deans (Student Surveys, p.27). However, given the generic phrasing of the question - “students can meet the Dean and Assistant Deans easily” - it is not clear whether this has any bearing on student ability to voice a concern or lodge a grievance, given other channels of communication available to students, as described above. Documents examined combined with on-campus interview records suggested to the Panel that CAS Nizwa has a satisfactory grievance process in place for students to voice their concerns and opinions.

1.11 Health and Safety

CAS Nizwa has taken steps to improve its health and safety infrastructure, partly guided by recommendations from the Directorate General of Civil Defence (DG-CD) issued in November 2010 pursuant to a campus audit. These recommendations centered on putting in place a fire safety system. By the Panel’s visit in March 2012, fire detectors had been installed, but not activated, and the Panel was informed no fire drills had been held. The Panel was told that the College was waiting for the DG-CD to activate detectors. Other recommendations from the DG-CD still need to be carried out, such as the water provisioning for fire hoses and installing signage for emergency exits. As the College pointed out, it is in the process of implementing fire safety steps, with a dedicated budget function and efforts to raise awareness of fire risk and safety procedures (Portfolio, pp.22-23). While recognising the College’s efforts in this area, The Panel urges the College, in conjunction with the MoHE, to ensure that its fire protection system is operationalised.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa ensure that it operationalises its fire protection system and that appropriate drills and training are carried out.

The Panel appreciated efforts by CAS Nizwa to offer workshops and lectures on stress management and other preventive care measures to its staff, and recognises the potential benefits students derive from having a Health Committee (‘Salamatek’) in place to promote healthy lifestyle choices. CAS Nizwa is also aware of the need for better health and emergency care services on its campus (Portfolio, pp.22-23), informed in part by dissatisfaction expressed in student surveys (see Section 7.8).

In broad terms, however, the Panel had concerns about campus safety and the management of risks to people and property. Although students report that they feel personally secure on campus during the daytime, the Panel found occupational health and safety risks related to facilities and, to some extent, equipment. For example, the academic computing equipment based at the LRC is housed in the same room as the electrical substation for the building, posing a potential fire and safety risk as well as a risk to service continuity. The lack of action in these areas presents a danger to students and staff on campus, as well as to expensive infrastructure.

Recommendation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement a health and safety policy and a regular programme of health and safety audits.

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

CAS Nizwa does not have oversight of any associated entities.

2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMMES

CAS Nizwa offers three degree programmes: International Business Administration with a major in International Business Management (introduced in academic year 2011/12); Design with majors in Digital Design, Graphic Design and Spatial Design; and Communication Studies with majors in Digital Media, Media Management, Journalism, Public Relations and International Communications. The degrees are awarded by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). All undergraduate students are required to take General Requirements courses during the first two years of their degree studies which include Omani Economic History, Arabic Language and Islamic Culture which are taught in Arabic (Portfolio, p.26). All other courses are taught in English. The College also offers a Foundation Programme which covers English, Computer Skills, Mathematics and Study Skills for those students who do not pass the entry test. The degrees are based on programmes provided by the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC) which played a role in the assurance of the quality and standards of the awards (see Section 1.4).

This Chapter reports on the Panel's findings in relation to the following: graduate attributes and student learning objectives; curriculum; student entry standards; teaching quality; plagiarism; student placements; assessment methods; standards and moderation; academic security and invigilation; student retention and progression; and graduate destinations and employability.

2.1 *Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives*

CAS Nizwa states that it has a commitment to ensuring all its graduates are equipped with the knowledge and ability necessary to gain graduate employment, pursue postgraduate study and become lifelong learners and thereby contribute to Oman's economy and society (Portfolio, p.24). The College has a set of three overarching graduate attributes which it describes as being in line with its Mission and incorporates the core values of the institution. These are for students to:

- *become lifelong learners with an ability to take on responsibility for their own learning and having information literacy and technology skills, intellectual and cognitive skills and research and enquiry skills;*
- *develop a commitment to Omani culture and identity through the common programme, contextualised degree programmes and extracurricular activities;*
- *develop a sense of global citizenship through becoming culturally aware, developing skills of team and self-directed work, to be able to make independent judgements and to have excellent oral, written and electronic communication skills (Portfolio, p.24).*

The College states that these skills are developed through the core curriculum and through broader engagement with College life (Portfolio, p.25). From discussions with students and a wide range of staff involved with the development and the delivery of the curriculum, the Panel gained a sense that there was a commitment to ensuring that students gain these graduate attributes. The Panel was informed that a graduate attribute mapping exercise was begun in 2011 to ensure that programme outcomes align with the full range of graduate attributes. CAS Nizwa needs to work with the Programme Directors (PDs) and academic staff in other colleges to ensure that the achievement of graduate attributes is monitored and assessed. The College acknowledges that the most reliable method of assessing whether students have gained graduate attributes will come from employer feedback (Portfolio, p.26). This is not yet available as at the time of the audit only two cohorts of students had graduated from the programme (see Affirmation 5).

2.2 *Curriculum*

The curriculum is based on the degree programmes and learning materials supplied by NZTEC and is common across CAS colleges offering the same programmes. A core General Requirements set of courses is incorporated which includes Islamic culture and Arabic language skills (Portfolio, p.26). Course Coordinators, in cooperation with Heads of Department (HoDs), are responsible for monitoring the delivery of the curriculum. Course appraisals are carried out at the end of each semester by Course Coordinators and meetings are held with PDs to consider the effectiveness of course delivery and the possible need for changes (Portfolio, pp.26-27). Academic staff and HoDs confirmed that these are carried out according to a timetabled schedule. Students confirmed that they are provided with course outlines which are agreed by the Course Coordinators from across the colleges in consultation with the relevant PD. CAS Nizwa student satisfaction surveys indicate that students are generally satisfied with their programmes (Portfolio, p.27). Faculty and students see courses content as relevant.

The College states that the original programme content has been reviewed by PDs and academic staff to ensure that it is contextualised for the local culture (Portfolio, p.26). From the Panel's discussions with a cross section of academic staff and students and consideration of supporting materials it was found that local contextualisation of programme content is gradually taking place. Any modification of the core curriculum or of the course materials has to be agreed by all the CAS colleges offering that programme and approved by the PD and the Department of Academic Programmes at DG CAS. Interviews with staff and HoDs indicated that the emphasis was on ensuring common course content rather than learning outcomes, an issue which needs to be considered during the annual programme review process (see Section 1.9).

In its 2011 Graduate Review Report, NZTEC raised concerns about the sequencing of courses and the alignment of content with the needs of employers. The Panel was informed that the focus of the CAS programmes was to prepare students for the workforce although in interviews students raised concerns about the balance between theory and practice in the current curriculum. Learning materials considered by the Panel suggested that too much of the curriculum may be being delivered through lectures with insufficient attention being given to enabling students to develop practical skills (see Section 2.5). A Ministerial Decision provided to the Panel from 2011 indicated the intention to establish CAS network level committees to review the curricula in terms of content, practical elements and evaluation but no progress had been made in this area at the time of the audit. This is an area that the College is urged to review in light of its Mission to meet national and regional employment needs.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, implement plans to review its curricula to ensure an appropriate balance between practice and theory in line with its Mission as a College of Applied Sciences.

2.3 *Student Entry Standards*

Admission to the College is administered by the Higher Education Admissions Centre in accordance with the CAS admissions criteria. Allocation to institution and major is determined by students' achievement in the General Education Diploma as well as demonstration of any major-specific requirements. Students admitted to the Design programme are required to have a B grade in Fine Arts in the General Education Diploma (Portfolio, p.27). Academic staff suggested that those coming onto the degree programme had little grasp of what a degree in Design involves and few were adequately prepared. Teaching staff suggested that a requirement to submit a Portfolio in conjunction with a high grade in Fine Art would enable a better evaluation of

students' potential for taking a degree in Design. This is an area that the College is encouraged to explore.

2.4 *Foundation Program*

Prior to entry to a degree programme students are required to take an entry test. If they do not pass this test they enrol on a Foundation Programme. The Panel was informed that nearly all students entering CAS Nizwa enrol on the Foundation Programme. The Foundation Programme is designed to enable students to gain a strong base in four core subjects, English Language, Mathematics, Computing and Study Skills. Students who fail to pass the Foundation Programme in English are required to suspend their studies for one year and return to take the entry test. If they pass at the required level they are then able to progress.

From Panel discussions with a cross-section of academic staff and students, it was evident that there is nevertheless concern about the standard of English of some students progressing into the degree programme. In the 2011 Graduate Review Report, NZTEC recommended that there be a fully articulated approach to the student's learning of English within the degree programmes. Staff teaching on degree programmes confirmed that while students may have a grasp of subject knowledge and degree of understanding, their ability to communicate in English does not always reflect this. The College is encouraged to promote a formal interface between those teaching on the Foundation Programme and those delivering the academic programmes in order to identify key issues and potential solutions for supporting students.

The required standard of competency in English Language for progression to the degree programme is the equivalent of IELTS 4.5 (Portfolio, p.28). The Panel noted that this was not in line with Oman's Standards for General Foundation Programmes and was aware that the College found that the standard of English required may not be adequate, indicated by the low progression rate from the Foundation Programme to the degree programmes. This concern has been recognised by the recent decision to introduce a four-semester Foundation Programme which accommodates weaker students (Portfolio, p.29). While the Panel considered this to be a good first step, it felt that consideration also needed to be given to the appropriateness of the required exit level of students from its Foundation Programme to ensure that students are meeting the English language learning outcome standards.

Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Science Nizwa review its current English competency standard for students to enter degree programmes to ensure that it is in line with Oman's Standards for General Foundation Programmes.

2.5 *Teaching Quality*

In the Portfolio, the College stated that student learning is central to its Mission and that it aims to maintain a high standard of education to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge, skills and experience that will be of a lifetime value [*sic*] (Portfolio, p.29). CAS Nizwa states that it does this through providing a learner-centred education with an emphasis on problem-based approaches using a variety of approaches including lectures, tutorials, group projects and presentations (Portfolio, p.29). CAS Nizwa claims that its teaching facilities have been developed on a par with international standards and Blackboard is used to augment face-to-face communication and thereby enhance the student learning experience through the use of a virtual learning experience (Portfolio, p.30).

The delivery of courses across the CAS network is standardised through the use of teaching portfolios that include course outlines, course materials and assessment procedures and criteria.

These are made available by Course Coordinators in cooperation with PDs (Portfolio, p.29). The Panel was informed that the College has also developed an annual Professional Development Programme which aims to share good practice and innovation (see Section 8.5). There are staff development workshops and academic staff members are supported to attend national and international conferences.

Blackboard is available and a Standard Use Policy was introduced in 2010/11 for all courses taught in English and training workshops provided for academic staff. However, discussions with staff and students indicated that Blackboard was used mainly for communicating information and not as a tool for pedagogy. Discussions with staff also confirmed that there was an over-reliance on Power Point presentations, provided for delivery of courses.

From the Panel's discussions with a cross-section of academic staff and students and a review of the documentation provided, it was clear that students are appreciative of staff and generally feel supported by them. However, the opportunities for self-directed learning seem limited and students are not systematically given opportunities to develop as independent learners. In the 2011 Graduate Review Report, NZTEC recommended a progressive reduction in class contact time as students move through their degree programme to make space for this. The requirements for delivering a common curriculum using provided Power Point presentations and lecture notes may make this difficult to accommodate and calls for a review of the course materials. From the Panel's discussions with students and staff, few students are reading recommended texts and other suggested reading material. The requirement that all students undertake an independent project as suggested by NZTEC may be one strategy for enabling students to become independent, self-directed learners. This is an area that needs to be explored by the College in order to support students in achieving the stated graduate attributes.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Science Nizwa review its approach to programme delivery to ensure that students have more opportunities for self-directed learning to enable them to attain the full range of graduate attributes.

Student evaluation of teaching can be completed at the end of each semester via Blackboard. The Panel found little evidence that students had completed evaluation questionnaires and that the evaluation process was having a positive impact on the improvement of teaching quality. The College is urged to review its approach to seeking course evaluation from students in order to ensure that an effective system is in place and that students are informed of actions taken in response to their feedback.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Science Nizwa review its course evaluation mechanism to ensure that students are fully engaged; actions taken in response to feedback are communicated to students; and that it is used as an effective tool to enhance the quality of teaching.

2.6 Plagiarism

CAS Nizwa sets out its commitment to preventing and addressing plagiarism which is recognised as academic misconduct in the CAS Bylaws and punishable by a range of penalties (Portfolio, pp.30-31). The Panel was informed that students are made aware of the consequences of plagiarising and are given support on techniques to avoid it on the Foundation Programme. Students are also taught how to reference according to standard conventions. The College uses a plagiarism detection tool, *SafeAssign*. Discussions with a range of academic staff and students

showed that there is a good understanding of plagiarism, of how to avoid it and the consequences of plagiarising.

Although there is a range of penalties, the Panel found that there is no consistent application of a plagiarism policy across departments in the College. The English Department has developed a plagiarism policy and the Panel was informed that this will be recommended to College Council for implementation across the College. The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area and encourages it to take further steps to ensure that a College-wide policy is implemented in the near future.

Affirmation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop and implement a unified policy on plagiarism that is consistently implemented across the College and supports its efforts in this area.

2.7 *Student Placements*

The College stresses the importance of preparing students for the workplace and the role that placements can play in the development of employment related skills (Portfolio, p.32). The Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre (TSCCC), in cooperation with the academic departments and employers, has been exploring opportunities for work experience placements in the government and private sectors and some students have undertaken these. Students who undertake placement are provided with assessment forms for employers to complete. However, with staff shortages at the College, and the fact that placement is not credit-bearing, the College states that its capacity to supervise and follow-up has limited the provision and uptake of such opportunities (Portfolio, p.32).

The Panel has already noted the importance of having a balance between theory and practice within the curriculum (see Section 2.2). It was made clear to the Panel in interviews that the College recognises the challenge in providing appropriate work experience opportunities for all students. The Panel was informed that there were discussions on developing a draft policy to explore the introduction of credit-bearing work placements and the need for academic staff development to implement this. However, discussions with a range of students and graduates from different programmes indicated that the College needs to do more to facilitate students having appropriate work placement opportunities.

Recommendation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa provide further support for student work placements to ensure that students have the opportunity to gain practical experience and enhance their employability on graduation.

2.8 *Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation*

Assessment is designed to ensure that students are able to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes and an examination schedule is included in the academic calendar issued at the beginning of the academic year for all the colleges in the CAS network (Portfolio, p.25). Discussion with academic staff and HoDs indicated that a range of various assessment methods is used as appropriate for measuring learning outcomes. A final assessment does not have to be a written examination but may be, for example, an oral presentation, a seminar, a project or other appropriate method. Assessment is standardised across the colleges with a Board of Examiners (BoE) for each programme consisting of the PD and HoDs from all the colleges. The BoEs are responsible for ensuring that marking is consistent across the colleges and that assessment is

carried out in accordance with the academic regulations. To date NZTEC has played a significant role in assuring the quality and standard of the curriculum and student achievement, playing in effect the role of external programme validation experts and external examiners. From discussions with a cross-section of academic staff, HoDs and PDs and consideration of a range of documentation, the Panel noted that the CAS network has designed and operates an effective system of internal moderation in order to ensure a commonality of standards on the same programme across colleges. CAS Nizwa has benefited from this.

The College states that it wishes to ensure that the quality and standard of its awards are internationally comparable (Portfolio, p.25). In its reports, NZTEC stated that overall student achievement is in general on a par with that in New Zealand, indicated by 14 graduates from the CAS network gaining places to undertake postgraduate study abroad. Further evidence is said to be the high pass rate of students as they progress through their degree programme. However, NZTEC raised concerns about the standard of marking of individual students and expressed a general concern about some students' standard of English (see Section 2.3).

Discussions with senior managers and academic staff confirmed that there was a need for an overarching Assessment Policy, a system of periodic external review and an external examiner system, as noted in the 2011 NZTEC Graduate Review Report. This is essential if the College is to achieve its goal of ensuring that its graduates achieve international standards. The Panel was informed that plans are underway to establish an external examiner system and to review the current programmes in order to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to implement an external examiner system and, in conjunction with Programme Directors and other colleges, to review its approach to monitoring academic standards following the end of the agreement with the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium.

2.9 Academic Security and Invigilation

The College indicated that ensuring the integrity of student assessment is taken very seriously and that the College has procedures in place for the efficacy of invigilation and safeguarding the security of examination papers (Portfolio, p.33). HoDs are responsible for the implementation of the examination regulations and ensuring the security of examination papers to prevent leakages. The Dean takes responsibility for oversight. Students are made aware of the examination regulations which are posted on the doors of examination rooms and summarised on examination papers. Breaches of the examination regulations by students are dealt by the Students Investigation Committee who determines guilt and the penalty to be imposed. The Panel was satisfied with the safeguards the College has in place.

2.10 Student Retention and Progression

CAS Nizwa, in line with the other colleges in the CAS network, aims to have a retention rate of 80 per cent (Portfolio, p.34). In order to achieve its aim of enabling students to succeed it has put in place a range of procedures. The College states that these include a student tracking and early warning system, counselling support, academic guidance and additional learning resources in the Learning Resource Centre. Students who miss more than five per cent of class time are sent a warning and students with a grade point average of less than 2.00 are placed on probation and limited to taking 13 credit hours (Portfolio, p.34). In the 2010-2011 Operational Plan, the College has identified this as an area that needs improvement through "support and remediation".

CAS Nizwa recognises the need to provide appropriate advice and guidance for students on probation (Portfolio, p.34). The College notes that it only has retention records for the Foundation Programme and is strongly encouraged to review its management information systems to ensure that progression data is made available across all programmes. While the issues regarding progression rates in the Foundation Programme have been explored at the College (see Section 2.3), statistics in the Portfolio show that the pass rates for the degree programmes offered at the College in 2010-2011 are over 90 per cent and in some cases over 99 per cent (Portfolio, p.35). These pass rates would appear to contradict feedback from teaching staff on the challenges that students face during their studies, particularly in the area of English language skills (see Section 2.8). The Panel noted that these pass rates appeared to be unusually high and CAS Nizwa is urged to investigate this area as part of its implementation of moderation procedures.

Recommendation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa review its management information systems to ensure that it has accurate data on student retention and progression across the College and to investigate the reasons for the exceptionally high pass rates for degree programmes.

2.11 Graduate Destinations and Employability

In its Portfolio, the College stressed the importance of preparation for employment both in terms of subject knowledge, application and lifelong learning. Advisory Committees have been formed at a central level for some programmes offered by CASs to ensure an understanding of the needs and expectations of employers and to bridge the gap between the CAS colleges and the job market (Portfolio, p.35). The extent to which students are enabled to gain skills needed for employment and the balance between practice and theory has been noted above (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2). From the Panel's discussion with College management, staff and employers, there is clearly a need to market the programmes that the College offers and make employers more aware of the knowledge and skills of graduates. There was also a concern that the current award titles may not indicate the nature of the degrees to prospective employers and that consideration should be given to the generic use of BSc in the titles and in some cases the descriptors of specialisations as well. Graduates from the College were concerned about the lack of employment opportunities that made use of their specialised knowledge but it was unclear if this was due to a lack of employment opportunities or to the poor understanding by employers of the competencies of CAS graduates. In some areas graduates may be being produced ahead of the capacity of the labour market to absorb them. Equipping students with the skills to start their own business may support the entry of students into the labour market and the development of enterprises.

Although CAS Nizwa considers that employers are the best judges of the relevance, achievement, quality and standard of its degree programmes (Portfolio, p.26), there is currently no system in place for collecting employer feedback. At present the College lacks knowledge of the destinations of its graduates. However, the Panel was informed and found other evidence to indicate that a graduate tracking system to facilitate collecting employer feedback is under development for the CAS colleges by the DG CAS.

Affirmation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop and implement a systematic approach to gathering employer feedback and establish a database of its graduates in order to track destinations and supports its efforts in this area.

3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

At the time of the Quality Audit, CAS Nizwa did not offer research programmes *per se* so this section is not addressed in this Report.

4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

CAS Nizwa aspires to be a leading academic research institution (Portfolio, p.37). This is also expressed in the strategic objective to ‘Encourage a High Standard of Scholarship and Applied Research’ (Strategic Plan, Objective 4.4). The strategies to achieve this objective include:

- *Provide appropriate, enriching professional development opportunities*
- *Develop an applied research capacity within each centre of Specialisation (Strategies 4.4.1 and 4.4.2)*

This Chapter reports on the steps and activities that CAS Nizwa has undertaken in order to implement these strategies and examines the systems that the College has put in place to plan and manage its research activities.

4.1 *Research Planning & Management*

According to the College, steps have been taken towards achieving CAS Nizwa’s strategic goals for research, such as making funds available for conference attendance; organisation of training workshops; availability of research grants; availability of library resources; establishment of a refereed journal; organisation of symposia; and the establishment of a Scientific Research Committee (SRC) (Portfolio, pp. 37-38). Nonetheless there is no specific operational plan for research to support the achievement of the strategic objectives (see Recommendation 4).

The Scientific Research Department (SRD) is theoretically responsible for overseeing and coordinating research activities in the College (Articles 31 and 32 of the Executive Bylaws of the Royal Decree 62/2007). At the time of the audit, the Head of the SRD position was still vacant (a position usually assigned to the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research (ADAASR)). The SRC has been formed, however, to coordinate the research activities in the College, with four faculty members from different departments. Interviews with SRC members suggested that the intention to raise the profile of research has not yet been fully embedded in the College’s activities. The College is seen more as a teaching rather than a research institution and faculty members believe that there are not enough incentives for research. They also pointed out that the high teaching load, up to 19 hours per week, does not allow them sufficient time to engage in research. It is felt that the low priority given to research contradicts having it as one of the core requirements for promotion for Omani faculty.

A system needs to be put in place to better plan and manage research across the College. Currently, the conduct of research seems to be left to the discretion and direction of individual faculty members. An overall approach needs to be considered along with the recruitment for the Head of the SRD in coordination with the ADAASR. While the Panel recognises the positive institutional attitude towards research among faculty, such as submitting contributions to the CAS Journal, should be acknowledged, the College needs to build on this to develop a common conceptual framework for aligning research activities with the strategic objectives.

Recommendation 15

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa review its approach to establishing a research culture in line with its strategic objectives to ensure that research is systematically managed and developed.

4.2 *Research Performance*

The SRC makes an effort to encourage and raise awareness about research. CAS Nizwa seems to be moderately active in research despite the limitations in resources. According to the latest list of academic staff of 2011-2012, 26 out of 111 academic staff members have a PhD. Almost 200 conference presentations and publications have been produced by staff members in the last five years (Portfolio, p.39). However, departments vary quite considerably in their level of research activities. This might be due to the high turnover rate in some of the departments and there seem to be more incentives for engagement in research for Omani faculty than expatriate faculty. These incentives include opportunities for promotion and funding for conference presentations. Although the College submitted documentation to show that academic research activity was taking place, the College does not have an overarching research operational plan that could be used to manage and monitor research activities across the departments. This needs to be addressed. The Panel, though, acknowledges the value of research work undertaken at the individual level, and believes that research activities should be institutionalised (see Section 4.1).

4.3 *Research Funding Schemes*

Research is funded through two schemes: conference attendance and research project grants. Faculty members are granted leave and financial support to present at national and international conferences once per academic year. Omani faculty members receive additional support for conference attendance but this is subject to approval by the MoHE. They are also granted sabbatical leave. Approval for funding comes from the MoHE (Portfolio, p.40). According to the statistics provided in the Portfolio (Portfolio, pp.38-39), there has recently been more interest among faculty members in conducting research and presenting at international conferences. There were also examples of joint research projects with faculty members from other higher education institutions.

Indicative action for phase 2 of Strategy 4.4.1 of the Strategic Plan states “Provide funds annually for each department to enable faculty to present substantive papers at conferences”. Another action related to allocation of funds to research is the action for Strategy 6.2.2 “Develop and implement competitive, performance-based funding for applied research” which includes the establishment of a Research Funding Committee. At the time of the audit, these actions had not been implemented. The Panel was informed that the College had tried to secure some funds from the local companies to support their research activities but these are not sufficient to meet the increasing costs of research. While the Panel recognises the College’s efforts, it is of the opinion that more research resources are needed to enable the College to accomplish the stated objectives in the area of research.

Affirmation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to make efforts to secure further funding/resources for faculty members’ research activities and supports its efforts to do so.

4.4 *Consultancy Activities*

Although faculty members have served as members of external committees, at the time of the audit none of them were providing consultancy work to external clients. The Panel noted that this is an area that could be developed in future, especially given the applied science focus of the College and the wide range of expertise available.

4.5 *Intellectual Property, Ethics and Biosafety*

The College states that, as a teaching institution, there is no need for policies on ethics (Portfolio, p.40). However, the Panel strongly believes that since there is some research activity at the College, there is a need for policies for the development of a research ethics policy and procedures. Social research raises ethical concerns when students and staff undertake fieldwork. All empirical research should be subject to ethical scrutiny and approval. In addition, since faculty members are involved in development of teaching materials, there is a need for an intellectual property rights policy to be developed to clearly state who owns the copyright of these materials and research outputs.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement ethics and research policies (e.g. intellectual property rights) to underpin the development of its research culture.

4.6 *Professional Development for Research*

According to the College, it works towards enhancing the research capabilities of its faculty members through a series of workshops on research methods. These workshops are conducted by training institutes and sometimes by senior faculty members (Portfolio, p.40). The College planned to establish a Professional Development Committee in 2011-2012 that would be responsible for coordinating professional development activities. However, the committee had still not been established at the time of the audit (Portfolio, pp.37 and 40). The Panel urges the College to pursue this.

4.7 *Research – Teaching Nexus*

CAS Nizwa stated that a large proportion of the research work conducted at the College was directed towards the learning and teaching process (Portfolio p.41) but the Panel found limited evidence of research studies centered on issues related to teaching and learning at the College. The documents provided by the College on research studies conducted by faculty members indicated that there are studies in progress but the Panel could not establish the quality or relevance of these studies as they were incomplete. During the audit interviews, a few faculty members reported conducting research with students but no evidence was available to substantiate these claims. There is currently no systematic approach to the dissemination of research findings among faculty and staff. As the College develops its research profile, it is encouraged to review its approach to developing its research-teaching nexus.

5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Industry and community engagement is one of the main strategic objectives of the CAS colleges. Objective 5.2 of the Strategic Plan states that the College will: “Enhance engagement with business and industry in the community”.

This Chapter considers CAS Nizwa’s efforts in the area of industry and community engagement which addresses planning and management, relationships with industry and employers, relationships with the professions, relationships with other education providers, relationships with alumni, and relationships with the community at large.

5.1 *Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management*

CAS Nizwa has taken steps to establish reciprocal relationships with industry and the community. The area of industry and community engagement is managed by three units, namely, the Training and Student Career Counseling Centre (TSCCC), the Admission and Registration Centre (ARC) and the Student Service Centre (SSC) (Portfolio p.42). The College has established links with some of the industries in the Nizwa area but these are limited to student training and the use of the College facilities. The College refers to the importance of engaging with public and private sector in its Operational Plan 2010-2011 and outlines its plans to build strategic partnerships with industry and employers. However, this plan does not appear to be guiding the activities of the units responsible for industry and community engagement and there was no evidence to suggest awareness of operational planning amongst staff in these areas. The Panel found an overall lack of focus and direction in industry and community engagement planning and management to meet strategic and operational objectives. The College is urged to review its planning and operations in this area in order to ensure that a coherent approach is adopted.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement a systematic approach to its engagement with industry and the community supported by appropriate resources to align with the College’s strategic objectives in this area.

5.2 *Relationships with Industry and Employers*

Involvement of industry and employers in the College is largely carried out at the Directorate General level through the Board of Trustees (BoT) where different stakeholders and employers are represented. The BoT comprises prominent decision makers from different stakeholders in the public and private sectors and its role is to advise the Ministry on issues related to the relevance and effectiveness of the programmes (Portfolio p.42). The Panel noted the collaboration that was taking place with the Public Authority for Craft Industries to introduce a new major in craft design. The Panel urges the College to extend this strategy to other employers and seek their opinion about curriculum and quality of the graduates.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa formalise its relationship with industry and employers, such as through the formation of a local advisory committee.

5.3 *Relationships with Professions*

The College has no formal relationships with discipline-focused professional bodies, although the Panel was informed that some of the faculty members are individual members of professional bodies based on their qualifications and areas of expertise. This is an area the College needs to consider as its programmes become more established.

5.4 *Relationships with Other Education Providers*

The College has established links with other education providers. Some of these come as part of the College's membership in the CAS network or appointments made by the MoHE to various joint bodies and committees, e.g. the joint committee between the MoHE and the Ministry of Manpower (Portfolio p.43). The Panel also notes the collaboration the College has with the Higher College of Technology Nizwa for the provision of student training. The College is encouraged to maximise the opportunities for benchmarking and sharing expertise as a member of the CAS network.

5.5 *Relationships with Alumni*

Noting that the first cohort of students graduated in 2010, CAS Nizwa is planning to establish an alumni association (Portfolio p.44). This is included in the College's 2010-2011 Operational Plan in order to track student destinations and falls under the responsibility of the TSCCC (see Section 2.11). The Panel was informed that the College has recently started to build an alumni database that could then be used for establishing connections with graduates. The Panel encourages CAS Nizwa to continue this venture, as it will assist the College in maintaining fruitful contacts with alumni and also to monitor its graduate outcomes.

Affirmation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop an alumni association and supports its efforts to do so through the building of an alumni database.

5.6 *Relationships with the Community at Large*

The College states that it is involved in a wide range of social and humanitarian activities aimed at helping the society at large (Portfolio pp.44-45). This is done through different student committees. The Rovers Group, for example, has undertaken several activities with different sectors of the community. The College has also organised Open Days to familiarise the community with its services. The College's facilities have been frequently used by individuals and groups outside the College. The College recognises the need to further publicise itself in the community. In the 2010-2011 Operational Plan, a number of strategies to serve the wider community and to further engagement with the community at large has been included. As noted in Section 5.1, the Panel found that staff members were not aware of the operational level strategies. This will need to be addressed if the College is to meet its goals in this area. CAS Nizwa is also encouraged to develop ways to measure the success and impact of its activities.

6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

CAS Nizwa indicates that it is dedicated to “advancing student learning” and “striving for academic excellence” as indicated in the Strategic Goals 3 and 4 (Portfolio, p.46). This Chapter considers planning and management activities in the area of academic support services; registry; library services; information and learning technology services; academic advising; student learning support; and teaching resources.

6.1 *Academic Support Services Planning & Management*

The College reports that within the Strategic Plan, strategies have been mapped out to ensure that the learning resources centre and IT, multimedia facility and faculty offices are well equipped (Portfolio, p.46). The responsibility for the planning and management of the academic support services is coordinated by the academic departments, programme coordinators and academic support centres which include the Training and Student Career Counseling Centre (TSCCC); the Admission and Registration Centre (ARC); the Student Service Centre (SSC); and the Learning Resource Centre (LRC). According to the College, the academic department and the academic support centres prepare annual operational plans which are based on the Strategic Plan (Portfolio, p.47). The Panel found, however, that there was a limited evidence or awareness of planning amongst staff working in these sections. As noted in Section 1.5, the College is urged to carry out a coordinated review of how well it is planning academic support services to ensure appropriate levels of student access, resource availability and quality of service delivery.

6.2 *Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

The College receives the list of new students from the national Higher Education Admission Centre through the e-Academic System Centre at DG CAS. Upon acceptance, students submit their documents to the College-level Support Committee which undertakes the responsibility of filing the documents of the new students. The ARC is responsible for admission, registration, timetabling and follow up of students' academic records (Portfolio, p.47). Although the College informed the Panel that it was satisfied with the ARC's performance, there has been no user survey carried out by ARC to indicate the level of satisfaction.

The interviews with students indicated general satisfaction with admission and registration processes. The Panel found the use of the SIS database and direct connection to the e-Academic System Centre at DG CAS through the data exchange portal is a positive step forward in the use of IT within and between educational institutions. The staff and students indicated that the process of admission has become easy since the implementation of the SIS database.

6.3 *Library*

The Library is within the LRC and according to CAS Nizwa seeks to support the academic curriculum by providing both teachers and students with wide ranging resources and educational support services (Portfolio, p.48). The College states that the Library provides a variety of printed and electronic resources and has a lab equipped with 20 computers and one laser printer. The Panel was informed that the Library works in conjunction with relevant academic departments to obtain the resources to support the student learning experience. Books and educational resources are purchased through national and international book fairs and tenders (Portfolio, p.48). Electronic library facilities are accessible from any computer on the campus.

In the 2010-2011 Operational Plan, a critical review of the LRC was carried out to ensure that the resources provided met the needs of staff and students. Surveys were carried out with students and staff that showed that overall users were satisfied with the library service provision. The

LRC has developed its own activity-based plan in alignment with the College's Operational Plan, which includes offering training to students on how best to use the library facilities. As noted in Section 1.5, since the Operational Plan is dated until 2011, the College needs to review how to develop and implement an ongoing planning system to ensure that its strategic objectives in all areas, including learning resources, can be continually addressed. The Panel found that no record of the number of students using the Library is kept. The Panel concluded there is a need to develop a system to record the usage of the Library and its resources to support future planning.

6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

CAS Nizwa stipulates that it strives to provide labs, IT and multimedia facilities to support teaching learning in conformity to strategic goal 3.2.3 (Portfolio, p.50). The Information and Learning Technology (ILT) services are provided by the LRC through its three units: the Library, the Computer Unit and the Media Unit. The Panel found the multimedia labs to be well-equipped with printing facilities. The Panel was informed, however, that while these resources were generally meeting students' requirements, there is a need for updated software for some of the programmes.

The Panel found that there were no systems for logging usage or maintenance and repair of IT equipment, although there is a five-year replacement schedule for hardware. The College also needs to review its approach to ensure that there are adequate back up and data recovery systems for academic computing.

The Media Unit has two digital studios to support the Communication Programme but these were found to be insufficiently equipped to meet the needs of the programme. The Panel was informed that CAS Nizwa has recognised this and the request to upgrade these two studios to meet programme requirements has already been placed.

Affirmation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to improve its specialist teaching facilities, such as the digital studio for its Communication programmes and supports its efforts to do so.

One of the strategic objectives of the 2010-2011 Operational Plan aimed to ensure that there were sufficient trained technical staff members to maintain all specialist equipment. The Panel found, however, that there was a lack of specialist technical staff with responsibility for photography and post-production video equipment. This means that expensive and often delicate equipment required for the delivery of majors is not being expertly maintained. The need to ensure that technical staff members have the required training is addressed in Recommendation 22).

6.5 Academic Advising

CAS Nizwa states that its academic advising seeks to help students realise their potential and capabilities and notes that the role of the academic advisor is particularly important for students on academic probation (Portfolio, p.51). Students are assigned to academic advisors through ARC. Academic advisors are required to allocate two hours for academic counselling and another two hours for office hours in their weekly schedule. Students are informed of office hours through Blackboard, intranet, and notice boards (Portfolio, p.51). CAS Nizwa has indicated that it has started formal academic advising this academic year but is faced with the challenges of a high staff/student ratio, lack of offices for advising and lack of awareness amongst students. Interviews with students confirmed that these were key issues in the area of academic advising. The College has already taken action to address some of these challenges and initiated an Academic Advisory Committee to raise awareness among teaching staff. A guide on

counselling has also been prepared. The Panel supports the College's efforts to improve its provision of academic advising.

Affirmation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop its academic advising system so that it is consistently implemented throughout the College and supports its efforts such as through the establishment of the Academic Advisory Committee.

6.6 Student Learning Support

The College aims to provide students with a well-rounded learning experience through a holistic range of extracurricular activities with a particular emphasis on Omani heritage and culture (Portfolio, p.52). The SSC supervises College extracurricular activities which are arranged in co-operation with the academic departments. Extracurricular activities cover various cultural, social, sports, mass media, scientific and artistic activities. Although in the 2010-2011 Operational Plan the College states that it aims to improve student retention rates through support and remediation, the Panel found no evidence of a systematic approach to identifying struggling or at risk students. As it reviews its approach to academic advising (see Section 6.5), the College is urged to review its arrangements for identifying 'at risk' students and providing them with student learning support.

6.7 Teaching Resources

As mentioned in Section 6.4, CAS Nizwa has been developing its teaching resources including the development of digital studios. The College has 23 classrooms across the campus along with four Design laboratories and three Communication laboratories. In addition to the laboratories, the Design Department has one photography studio and three graphic studios. There are also two laboratories - one for networking and another for design-based activities. Classrooms and laboratories have IT and multimedia facilities such as LCDs, whiteboards, speakers, display devices and LCD projectors (Portfolio, p.53).

The Panel was informed that there have been some delays in the acquisition of teaching resources due to the complex processes involving the tender system and challenges faced as a result of centralised decision-making (see Recommendation 2 and Affirmation 8). The Panel also found that there was no systematic approach to the maintenance and replacement of teaching equipment, which may have a negative impact on providing a consistently well-supported learning environment. The College is urged to address this issue.

Recommendation 19

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa develop and implement a maintenance and replacement plan for its teaching resources.

7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

CAS Nizwa's commitment to all students is one of its core values and this includes providing a comprehensive range of student services. According to the College "these services are designed to best meet the various needs and talents of the students and enhance their lifelong learning" (Portfolio, p.54). In this Chapter, the Panel reports on student support services and their management; student profile; student satisfaction and behaviour at the College; and student financing. It also reports on career and employment services; accommodation and catering services; medical and counseling facilities; international student services; and social and recreational services and facilities.

7.1 *Students and Student Support Services Planning & Management*

Student support services are provided by the Department of Finance and Administration (DAFA), the Admission and Registration Department (ARC), the Student Services Centre (SSC) and the Training and Student Career Counseling Centre (TSCCC). The guidelines and responsibilities for these departments are outlined in the Executive Bylaw. Planning and management fall under the responsibility of the Director of Administration and Finance and the SSC. Students are represented in planning through the Student Council and its two committees, the Academic Committee and the Extracurricular Activities Committee (Portfolio, p.54). Although this area is addressed in the overall Strategic Plan, the Panel found only limited evidence to show that activities are planned and monitored at a departmental level. The College is urged to address this (see Section 1.5).

Students are given opportunities to voice their concerns and opinions as well as engage in different activities based on their talents and interests. The survey results considered by the Panel show that the students seem to be generally satisfied with the services and the opportunities made available to them. The College is encouraged to continue to monitor student satisfaction in order to gauge the effectiveness of its approach in the area of student support services.

7.2 *Student Profile*

DG CAS determines the needs of the market and CAS Nizwa's enrolment capacity. The students register through the Higher Education Admissions Centre and have to have passed the Omani General Education Diploma (Portfolio, p.54). The total number of students at CAS Nizwa for the academic year 2010/2011 was 1572 students with about 60% female and 40% male students. There are also four international students as part of the MoHE exchange programme for students. The students are all registered and data is maintained through the use of the SIS database as mentioned above in Section 6.2. The Panel was informed that the student numbers have increased over the years and further growth is planned. CAS Nizwa is encouraged to review its staff profile to ensure that there is adequate staff support provided in academic and administrative areas to reflect the anticipated increase in student population (see Section 8.2).

7.3 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

CAS Nizwa reported that it "spares no effort in promoting and maintaining a constructive ambience among its students" (Portfolio, p.56). The Panel was informed that CAS Nizwa has an open door policy through which students can discuss some of their issues directly with the Dean and other management staff. CAS Nizwa carried out a satisfaction survey in 2010 and identified a number of areas for improvement such as the catering and sports facilities. Although the Panel recognises the College's efforts in this area, satisfaction surveys now need to be carried out on a regular basis to monitor views and opinions amongst students. CAS Nizwa needs to review its

processes in responding to the student surveys and ensure that actions taken in response to feedback are communicated to all interested parties.

Recommendation 20

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa respond to student concerns highlighted in the recent student satisfaction survey; ensure that students are informed of changes made in response to their feedback; and introduce a schedule for surveys in order to regularly monitor student satisfaction.

7.4 Student Behaviour

CAS Nizwa has Bylaws that contain an article for a Student Accountability System (Portfolio, p.57). The students are informed about the system, which includes a code of conduct, during the orientation week and in the Student Handbook. Policies related to misconduct, violation of rules, vandalism or academic dishonesty and appeal procedure are also included in the handbook. Students interviewed by the Panel seemed generally aware of the policies and procedures related to behaviour. However, the Panel was informed that the handbook is provided only in English which may be difficult for Foundation students as their understanding of such written material may be limited. It is suggested that the College consider giving information about expected student behaviour in both Arabic and English, especially for new students joining the College.

7.5 Career and Employment Services

TSCCC is responsible for providing career and employment services to the students and graduates. In conjunction with other academic departments, TSCCC organises workshops, assists students in writing their curriculum vitae and arranges for mock interviews with students (Portfolio, p.58). The College has taken part in the CAS network Career Fairs with some 202 CAS Nizwa students reported to have attended the fair at Sohar in March 2010. Employers with whom the Panel spoke confirmed their own involvement in these Career Fairs. As the College now has a growing number of cohorts looking to enter the workforce, the Panel acknowledges CAS Nizwa's activities in this area.

There is a limit to the number of services which can be provided by the TSCCC owing to staffing shortages. The Panel was informed by alumni, students and staff that at the time of the audit there was only one staff member available to serve nearly 1600 students, an issue raised by the College itself (Portfolio, p.58). The Panel heard that the College has put forward plans to the DG-CAS to recruit more staff in this area. The Panel agrees that for the TSCCC to be fully effective it needs sufficient staff and supports the College's efforts to recruit more staff for this centre.

Affirmation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to develop its career guidance and employment activities and supports its efforts to expand its capacity in its Training and Student Career Counseling Centre.

7.6 Student Finances

CAS Nizwa is a government institution and all students admitted are entitled to free education. Moreover, the College provides 90 Omani Rials (OMR) monthly to students who live more than 100 kilometers away from the College to cover accommodation and transportation and 25 OMR monthly to students who live less than 100 kilometers for transportation. The international exchange students receive 200 OMR monthly to cover their accommodation, living expenses and

transportation (Portfolio, p.58). The Panel was informed that the College also provides free books and a quota of 450 pages of printed material per semester. The Panel was informed by students that 90 OMR is not enough to cover the students' living needs and that they have conveyed their concerns to the administration. Interviews with management staff indicated that the students' allowance is being reviewed at the Ministry level.

7.7 *Accommodation, Catering and Transport*

CAS Nizwa does not offer on-campus accommodation for students but assists students who require accommodation by providing a list of potential landlords and also resolving disagreements between students and landlords (Portfolio, p.59). The Panel learned from the students and from results of surveys that they need more assistance in finding accommodation. CAS Nizwa is urged to address student concerns highlighted in the recent student survey regarding accommodation and to ensure that students are informed of changes made in response to their feedback (see Recommendation 20).

Responsibility for the oversight of outsourced services such as transport and catering rests with the College. The Panel was impressed to find that the College had acted decisively on student and staff complaints about the food services and taken steps not only to change the supplier but to ensure regular monitoring of service quality by establishing a Restaurant Committee and appointing students to inspect and report on the restaurant regularly. Food service delivery appears now to be satisfactory, although the Panel encountered some concerns that the women's canteen is too small. Catering services at the College are now well-established.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa for developing and implementing a system to review and improve its catering facilities.

Transportation is provided by the College for educational visits, social and sporting events and medical emergencies.

7.8 *Medical and Counselling Facilities*

CAS Nizwa does not have medical facilities for students and staff but stated that first aid kits are available at various locations on the campus and a driver and bus for emergency transport are provided to an off-campus facility (Portfolio, pp.22-23). The College has been trying to establish an on-campus clinic but still there are no results (Portfolio, p.59). The Panel met staff and students and all expressed the need to have a clinic on site. Having a nurse on staff with the necessary clinic equipment would significantly enhance medical services available to students and staff at CAS Nizwa. In March 2011, the College requested a nurse be hired to staff an on-campus health clinic in accordance with MoHE quality assurance standards. However, no tangible progress has been made in this area. The Panel suggests that CAS Nizwa implement a programme of regular health and safety audits to trigger timely corrective action when needed.

Affirmation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that that it needs to develop on campus medical and counselling facilities and supports its efforts to do so with the assistance of the Ministry of Higher Education.

The Panel also noted that while there were first aid kits on site no one seemed to know who is responsible for these and there appeared to be no trained person for first aid. In a related area, the Panel was concerned about the risks to personal health and safety arising from the present

approach to the provision of campus health services (see Section 1.11). The Panel sighted substantial evidence of the activities of the student Health and Safety Committee “Salamatek”, in supporting health promotion. However, while this may be a worthy activity, the Panel did not consider this an adequate substitute for campus level capacity to respond rapidly and appropriately to staff and student health problems, including accidents and other emergencies. For example, the Panel was told by students involved in College sports activities that they themselves would have to provide first aid if someone were to be injured, although they had not been trained to do so. There is ample evidence of efforts by the College to address this situation and of reluctance on the part of the MoHE to find and approve reasonable solutions.

CAS Nizwa does not have counsellors but uses faculty advisory groups and students advisors to help students in coping with emotional, psychological, social and academic struggle (Portfolio, p.59). The Panel was informed that the Ego-Engineering Group and Islamic Culture Group play a big role in supporting and advising students in collaboration with the faculty advisory group. A concern has been raised by both faculty and students for ensuring the privacy of academic counselling sessions. No specific counselling space is available at the College and the staff offices do not provide enough privacy. This area is addressed in Affirmation 9.

7.9 *International Student Services*

CAS Nizwa does not enroll international students directly except with a pre arrangement through MoHE’s student exchange programme. As indicated in Section 7.2, there are currently only four international students and the Panel was informed that they are supported in various aspects of student life.

7.10 *Social and Recreational Services and Facilities*

CAS Nizwa reports that it provides “several recreational facilities such as the arts studio, media lab football field volleyball court and gymnasium” (Portfolio, p.60). The Panel learned from the staff of SSC that there are planned annual activities and that the College has the advantage of accessing the nearby Sultan Qaboos sports complex for many sporting activities. Students interviewed by the Panel identified the need to improve recreational facilities. Students reported that there is no grass on the football ground and female students do not have separate sport facilities on the campus. CAS Nizwa has already identified these gaps and now needs to develop a formal action plan to address students’ needs. The Panel agrees that CAS Nizwa needs to address this issue.

Affirmation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to review and improve its recreational facilities such as providing sports facilities for female students.

8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

CAS Nizwa states that commitment to staff is “clearly articulated as one of its values” (Portfolio, p.62). The Strategic Plan stresses commitment to all staff as one of its values, together with professionalism, fairness and transparency. Several of the objectives and actions supporting the fourth Strategic Goal seek to guide human resources (HR) management. For example, Objective 4.3 addresses actions to “Support Faculty Members to Advance Student Learning” through professional development programmes (Strategy 4.3.1). Objective 4.5 “Attract and Retain High Quality Staff” covers a range of actions relating to recruitment planning, induction, orientation workshops, actions relating to conditions of employment, including formal job descriptions, improved remuneration, performance appraisal. Objective 4.6 “Raise Staff Morale” addresses internal communication, workload policies and incentives.

This Chapter discusses the planning and management of HR; CAS Nizwa’s staff profile; its recruitment, selection and severance processes; staff induction and professional development activities; incentives and opportunities for advancement; processes for planning and review of performance; the organisational climate at the College; and its progress toward Omanisation.

8.1 *Human Resources Planning & Management*

Management of HR planning and policy is a shared responsibility of the Department of Administration and Finance in the CAS Directorate General and the Director of Administration and Financial Affairs (DAFA) at the College. The area is governed by Bylaws established by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the Ministry of Civil Service (MoCS) which cover the employment of both academic and administrative staff. Overall management and implementation of HR plans and policies are tightly controlled at MoHE level.

HR planning is done by the College on an annual basis beginning in January each year and underpinned by annual operational plans approved by the MoHE. However, the annual Operational Plan for the area is not explicitly aligned to the Strategic Plan. The Panel also found that senior administrative staff were not aware of the elements in the Strategic Plan although a number of initiatives the College is taking in the HR area address some of the relevant objectives of the Strategic Plan. Greater alignment between the two levels of plans would assist the College to move forward on this front (see Recommendation 4).

8.2 *Staff Profile*

CAS Nizwa is comprised of a diverse body of staff with a wide range of backgrounds and qualifications. Documentation provided by the College showed that in 2012, CAS Nizwa employed 185 academic, administrative and academic support staff. A little under two thirds (111) of the staff are academics, with about 20% employed in academic support positions and 15% in administration. While expatriate staff account for roughly 60% of faculty members, the academic support and administrative areas are staffed entirely by Omanis, many of whom have remained with the College through its transition from its teacher training college origins. Staff members in the support and administration areas are mostly male, while females make up about a third of the academic staff. While about two thirds of the faculty members are qualified to MA level, about a quarter hold PhDs, and fewer than half of these are Omanis. The College recognises the need to work with the MoHE to upgrade the qualifications of its academic staff (Portfolio, p.63).

The Panel noted that several senior positions in the College remain vacant, notably the Quality Assurance and Research positions, and considered that the lack of staffing in these areas is impeding the College’s ability to progress. There are also some staffing gaps in a few key areas

where staff are on study leave, for example, in the Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre (see Section 7.5). The Panel also concluded that turnover among senior staff in the DG CAS may have had some destabilising effect on policy and planning and may also indirectly contribute to the many delays experienced in approval of operational matters (see Section 1.2).

The Panel became aware that some key positions are outside of the College staffing profile and thus not part of the line management structure of the College. In particular, the Programme Director positions operate across the CAS system in a parallel structure which is commented on elsewhere (see Section 2.2); this means that leadership in curriculum matters is not under College control and may not always cohere with College level plans and resources. It also raises obstacles to communication; for example, the Panel encountered at least one instance in which a key document being handled centrally had not been provided in its entirety to the Dean of the College.

While recognizing the potential for efficiency and consistency in HR policy and practices which the strong framework of Bylaws brings, the Panel shared the College's concern that delays at Ministry level in approving and releasing key staff positions were having a negative impact on the College's ability to progress some actions mandated by the CAS Strategic Plan (see Recommendation 2). It also found instances where the Bylaws governing staff position descriptions and conditions appear to be out of kilter with the current realities of College operations and require review (see Section 8.3).

8.3 *Recruitment and Selection*

Processes for recruiting and selecting academic staff are shared between the College and the Department for Administrative and Financial Affairs at DG-CAS (Portfolio, p.63). The College DAFA works with the heads of the academic departments on an annual basis to identify future staffing requirements with reference to anticipated vacancies and enrolment projections, and submits annual staffing plans and budget requests to the MoHE. Approval of recruitment requests and position funding comes from the Ministry after discussion and negotiation with the College, and the DG CAS has the final say as to how many faculty members will be recruited. Academic staff members are then hired either directly by the MoHE or through a recruitment channel such as the Centre for British Teachers. CVs of potential staff are sent to the College for shortlisting and the Dean and HoDs are normally involved at the interview stage. It was explained to the Panel that the centralised approach aims to increase efficiency in recruitment and is seen as a service to the colleges. The College has the right to refuse any staff whom it considers inappropriate. Staff to whom the Panel spoke indicated that, based on their experience, the process works smoothly.

The Panel heard that despite enrolment growth and the objectives set out in the Strategic Plan, not all positions requested are approved and not all positions approved are funded or released for recruitment. It also learned that delays in approvals create problems at College level. For example, delays in the appointment of academic staff impact on student learning by forcing the College to lower staff/student ratios in some areas or to limit the number of courses on offer in particular programmes, thus obliging students to slow their progress towards their degrees. The Panel heard a number of examples of this from staff and students, and became aware of a high level of frustration within the College at delays emanating from the central bureaucracy (see Recommendation 2).

Staff members in support and administrative positions are recruited through the Public Authority for Manpower Register, to which recruitment requests are forwarded by the College via the DG CAS. The selection process is carried out by representatives of the Authority, the MoHE, the MoCS and the college department concerned. Only vacant positions may be filled unless the

College is able to obtain new positions from the Ministry of Finance, something which, the Panel was informed, is extremely difficult.

The Panel noted that “professionalism, fairness and transparency” are among the core CAS values and that the Strategic Plan identifies the need to ensure that job descriptions are available for each staffing level (Strategy 4.5.2). In that context, the Panel heard that existing position descriptions for some categories of support staff are not reflective of current operational requirements in some areas and that there have been delays in actioning the reclassification of other positions, with the result that affected staff do not have access to the conditions and benefits associated with the role they are currently performing. For example, the opening hours for student access labs do not align with working hours required of computer technicians specified in existing positions descriptions. Staff in professional positions (such as in the Library and IT) are classified as administrative and do not therefore have access to specialist benefits, such as technical allowances. The Panel also heard of delays in the handling of paperwork for confirming reclassified positions. Heads of administrative departments, for example, are still considered to be “acting” in their roles, despite the positions having been reclassified in 2007 following organisational restructuring. Such examples align poorly with the strategic intent of the College.

Recommendation 21

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, act on and confirm the position reclassifications and conditions for heads of administrative departments holding acting designations and review the classification of technical and professional support staff.

8.4 Induction

While the MoHE takes responsibility for on-arrival services for new expatriate staff, induction is carried out by the College, at both College and department level (Portfolio, p.64). A variety of initiatives have been put into place recently to improve the induction of staff, including a welcoming reception hosted by the Dean, provision of a “Welcome Pack” and the introduction in 2011-12 of a Fact Book prepared for new academic staff by the Department of English. The Panel also saw slides of presentations covering background information on the CAS system, key policies etc. While these are good initiatives, the Panel was informed that they are not consistently delivered across the institution nor are they yet coordinated to address the needs of staff who arrive at different points in the semester or year. The College has identified the induction of new staff as an area requiring systematic planning and the establishment of a formal induction programme (Portfolio, p.65). It has been taking steps to address deficiencies in this area and is urged to continue to attend to improving current provision.

Affirmation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to further develop its staff induction activities and supports its efforts to establish a consistently delivered formal induction programme.

8.5 Professional Development

The intent to enhance the professional development of staff recurs throughout the current Strategic Plan (Strategic Goals 3 and 4), and CAS Nizwa asserts that it seeks to foster a professional development culture among faculty in pursuit of the CAS Vision (Portfolio, p.65). In 2009, the College initiated an in-house Professional Development Programme (PDP) for staff, comprising workshops, training sessions and seminars by guest speakers, and the Panel was pleased to find evidence that these types of activities are continuing; for example, it noted

compulsory training sessions in the use of Blackboard offered by the academic departments in 2010-11. The PDP is currently coordinated by a member of the English Department, as the College has deferred the establishment of a Professional Development Committee planned for the 2011/12 academic year (Portfolio, p.37)

The Panel found evidence, including data on participation rates, that the PDP had been clearly planned and well received by staff and that participation rates, while unevenly distributed across departments, confirmed uptake of the opportunities on offer. Staff to whom the Panel spoke reported that they had found the PDP helpful.

Commendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa for developing and implementing an in-house Professional Development Programme to support academic staff development.

The College also provides support for individuals to attend external activities, such as conferences and scholarships, to undertake higher qualifications, in line with MoHE and CAS Bylaws. The College's training plan is approved by the Ministry and funded by the College from a dedicated budget line. An example of the training plan for 2011 indicated that training programmes were authorised and funded for 71 staff, although only about half undertook the planned training due to programme cancellations or their own unavailability. Academic staff the Panel spoke to seemed to be content overall with their access to professional development opportunities. However, the Panel noted that they did not demonstrate much understanding of their own responsibility for continuously improving teaching methods or subject knowledge, and it felt that more could be done at department level to instill a continuous quality improvement culture in this regard.

As regards administrative and support staff, the College acknowledges that there are still areas of concern with respect to professional development, particularly insofar as it must comply with Civil Service regulations (Portfolio, p.66). The Panel confirmed that administrative staff members were not happy about what is perceived to be restrictive access to professional development and heard complaints related to limits on the number of staff who can be released and the length of time they can be away. Staff in rapidly changing areas, e.g. IT technicians, are particularly affected, and must try to keep up-to-date with equipment and software in own time. Only limited professional development was said to be available for Library staff, and some administrative and support staff who sought study leave to upgrade their formal qualifications had found that quotas prevented their doing so.

Recommendation 22

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review the current professional development opportunities available to administrative staff, acknowledging the changing roles and expectations arising from the move from Colleges of Education to Colleges of Applied Sciences.

8.6 Performance Planning and Review

CAS Nizwa seeks to implement the expectations of the Strategic Plan with respect to developing and maintaining an effective performance system for all its staff, in line with MoHE policies (Portfolio, p.66). It attests that all employees who have finished at least six months service undergo an annual "Job Performance Efficiency Assessment". The Panel found that this system

does indeed appear to be in place and functioning as intended, although there are variations in the way it is being implemented in different academic departments.

However, while the performance review component of the process appears well embedded and is considered by the College to be “reasonably effective” (Portfolio, p.67), the performance planning aspect is not well developed, nor is the process linked to professional development of staff. Under the current MoHE policies, feedback about the outcomes of the review is only provided to individuals when significant performance problems are identified. While this enables supervisors to undertake performance management as required, it does not recognise achievement nor support the further growth and development of individuals in the College workforce. Appreciation of exemplary job performance cannot be formally conveyed to an employee, thereby limiting the College’s ability to nurture professional excellence. This is a policy deficiency which needs to be addressed. The Panel also learned that new mechanisms for faculty appraisals proposed by CAS Ibri have been approved by the system Academic Council and that CAS Nizwa will implement these once MoHE approval has been granted.

Recommendation 23

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, review its policies on performance appraisal to ensure all staff members receive feedback and that results are linked to professional development planning.

Student “Evaluations of Courses and Faculty Members”, managed electronically on Blackboard, are claimed to be part of performance review for academic staff (Portfolio, p.67). Although the system delivers reports to the faculty member concerned, it is not clear how systematically students take the opportunity to do these evaluations (see Section 2.5).

8.7 Promotion and Other Incentives

Promotion and incentives for staff employed in the CAS colleges are governed by the CAS Executive Bylaw and can only be handled through the MoHE (Portfolio, p.67). Publication of research papers is required for promotion to higher academic grades, and the interface between this requirement and the College’s move to increase its active research profile is noted (see Chapter 4).

At present, only Omani staff members are eligible for promotion but there has been significant dissatisfaction with the current system and a new policy, providing promotion for eligible expatriate as well as Omani staff, was nearing completion at the time of the audit visit. The Panel was informed that the new policy would support greater fairness and it urges the College to implement this.

Affirmation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to introduce a comprehensive and more equitable system for promotion and supports its efforts to introduce a new policy.

8.8 Severance

Severance and administrative accountability for it are regulated by the CAS Bylaws and are centrally administered by the MoHE. The College reported a staff turnover rate of just under 5% (8 terminations) in 2010, including voluntary resignation and contract expiry (Portfolio, p.68).

8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

CAS Nizwa is attempting to address the Strategic Plan objectives relating to maintaining and raising staff morale through a variety of initiatives, including attention to ensuring effective intra-college communication and the provision of social activities, among other measures.

Staff retention, particularly among expatriate faculty in the English Department is a matter of ongoing concern to the College and the College acknowledges the pressures of competition for skilled staff from elsewhere in the region. Maintaining staff morale, especially among Omani faculty and staff who continued into CAS Nizwa from the former College of Education and have therefore been with the College for a long time, is another area identified for attention by the College (Portfolio, p.69). Staff survey results suggest that staff at CAS Nizwa are generally satisfied with the organisational climate at the College, and the Panel formed the impression from speaking with both staff and students that the organisational climate at the College is good (see Commendation 1).

8.10 Omanisation

CAS Nizwa benefits from a high level of Omanisation of its workforce, especially in academic support and administration areas (100% Omani) and in executive leadership positions. While the high levels of Omanisation may in part be attributed to the presence of legacy staff from the former College of Education, data provided by the College indicate an increase in Omanis in academic positions (Portfolio, p.79) over the past five years.

There is also evidence that attention is being paid to assisting Omani staff to upgrade their qualifications through the provision of scholarships. Data indicated that 17 Omani staff, four of them non-academic staff, are currently being supported to pursue higher degrees, mostly in overseas institutions. Two have recently completed their degrees and another three have received approval to begin study programmes. The College does not always benefit from the study programme as the Panel was informed that four of the listed staff have been transferred to CAS Sohar.

9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

While the Strategic Plan is largely organised around the academic activities of the colleges and the needs of students and faculty, actions and objectives relating to general support services and facilities are embedded in various sections of the plan. CAS Nizwa, while addressing many of the objectives and strategies cited in the Strategic Plan, nevertheless does not explicitly tie its Portfolio discussion of its activities in these areas to the Strategic Plan.

This Chapter covers the planning and management of general support services, including communication, public relations and marketing and the planning and maintenance of the College campus and facilities.

9.1 *General Support Services and Facilities Planning & Management*

Planning and management of general support services and facilities are the responsibility of the Department of Services (DS) under the Director of Administration and Financial Affairs (DAFA). Responsibility for planning and managing public relations and marketing is shared but largely centered in the Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre (TSCCC). The College has control over small maintenance items which can be funded from its own recurrent budget but it must seek funding and approval from the Ministry of Higher Education for larger items over 10,000 OMR. All the relevant administrative units prepare annual operational plans and report that most of the goals set for the year are achieved, although in some instances they do not have financing from the MoHE to do this. These plans are approved, and budgets are provided by the MoHE after consultation with the Dean (except in the case of DAFA, where plans presently goes directly to the MoHE, although the Dean sees them first). There does not appear to be a formal process of accountability for the achievement of planned objectives. In these general services areas, as in others, the Panel found considerable frustration with delays in Ministry approvals of plans, projects and funding, evidenced, for example, by repeated, unsuccessful funding requests for extra lab equipment (see Recommendation 2). It heard, however, that procurement services for small purchases and funding for activities which, like the small maintenance items do not require MoHE approval, are provided from within the College's operating budget and are generally made available promptly.

The Panel found there was no awareness of the Strategic Plan among staff responsible for general support services and facilities, nor any attempt to align operational plans to the broader goals of the Strategic Plan. Nor did it find evidence of long range planning in these areas, although it was made aware that separate funding lines exist within the DG CAS for major facilities development (see Section 1.6). However, it did appear that the College was consciously advancing some of the relevant objectives of the Strategic Plan, as evidenced by reporting on actions relating to Objective 3.2 in a Strategic Plan Progress Update Report. The College is urged to ensure that operational plans for all departments align with the overall strategic objectives and that staff awareness is increased (see Recommendation 4).

Although staff and student surveys conducted from time to time have included questions about services and facilities, the Panel was not able to find evidence of regular, formal mechanisms by which the DS and other service units seek feedback on the adequacy of the services they provide. Nor was it clear what mechanisms are in place in the services areas to act on and report actions taken in response to student and staff feedback.

Recommendation 24

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa gather regular user feedback on its general

support services to enable it to address areas in need of improvement and ensure that feedback is given to staff and students on actions taken.

9.2 *Public Relations and Marketing*

Strategic Goal 2 “Build the Reputation of the Colleges of Applied Sciences” deals with public awareness and relations. The promotion and marketing of the CAS colleges is identified as an area needing significant attention across the system, and many of the initiatives in this regard, such as the production of the attractive CAS prospectus or the organisation of Careers Fairs (see Section 7.5), are being coordinated and implemented centrally with the participation of all the colleges.

CAS Nizwa has also begun to take steps to address its own marketing and public relations profile, primarily through the work of the TSCCC (see Section 7.1), although the academic departments also organise promotional activities, such as Design Day. At present, most of the public relations (PR) activities comprise linking the College with employers via student work placements. The College is awaiting DG CAS approval for the recruitment of a PR Officer (Portfolio, p.72). Other promotional activities appear to rely more on the initiative of external stakeholders than of the College, for example, secondary schools which contact the College to arrange for their students to visit the campus or external stakeholders who initiate contact with the College to investigate cooperative arrangements for a new community service venture. The College could also explore the potential of the CAS website as a marketing tool. The College is encouraged to pursue its plans to promote its profile.

Affirmation 15

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to raise its profile and marketing and recognises its efforts to create the structures to do this.

9.3 *Communication Services*

The Strategic Plan identifies improvements in communication within and between colleges as a mechanism for improving staff morale. CAS Nizwa states that “internal communication with its staff and students is effected at different levels and proceeds through various channels” (Portfolio, p.72). At present, these channels include committee meetings and minutes, electronic bulletin boards, email, SMS messages, letters in staff pigeonholes and booklets and pamphlets to circulate information to members of the College community.

There is recognition within the College that it is a bilingual community, although most of the administrative staff appear to speak Arabic only and the Panel noted that messages on the LCD displays posted around the campus were in Arabic. The administrative staff in general did not report problems about communication, and explained that they deal mostly with the Arabic-speaking Heads of Department when there is a need for interface on academic matters. Some support is offered through the provision of English language classes for them, but scheduling reportedly makes these difficult to attend. Academic staff say that intra-college communication works reasonably well on a day to day basis but those who do not speak Arabic do not have access to important policy communications from the MoHE, which come only in Arabic. The College is aware of this “language barrier” and is considering whether it should provide translations of such documentation from within its own resources (Portfolio, p.73) but to date has not taken steps to do so. Students, of course, speak Arabic, but the Panel did hear that those who enter with particularly weak English were not able adequately to understand orientation material written in that language and therefore did not always learn at the outset about the policies which affect them.

Overall the Panel felt that the communication in the College works well enough on a day to day basis and that staff and students are on the whole contented. However, there is marked frustration with the problems generated by the monolingual communication interface with the DG CAS/MoHE and the Panel noted that policies and official communication from the MoHE are not translated at source, despite the presence of a significant population of non-Arabic speaking staff in the CAS system.

Affirmation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Nizwa that it needs to take steps, in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, to ensure that College-wide communications are accessible where appropriate to all staff and students whether English or Arabic speaking and supports its efforts to do so.

9.4 Facilities Management

CAS Nizwa's campus environment appeared to the Panel as being well maintained and pleasant. The Panel heard from staff and students that they were proud of the appearance and general amenity of their campus. However, budget constraints mean that the College has not been able to expand its facilities infrastructure to keep pace with rising enrolments. As mentioned earlier (see Section 6.5), space constraints were reported for activities such as rooms for advising and office space.

In the Strategic Plan, Goal 6 "Achieve Sustainable Funding Resources" contains objectives and strategies relevant to this area, for example, Strategy 6.5.1 "Review ancillary services with a view to outsourcing". As noted, services such as cleaning and gardening are outsourced (Portfolio, p.71), and the Panel learned that the College largely controls the selection of contractors, although tenders are let by the DG CAS. The Panel was able to examine the contracts for these services and heard from the DS staff that there have been very few problems over time, with just three significant problems in 14 years, only one of which necessitated the replacement of a contractor. Apart from this, monitoring of quality assurance of services on campus were found by the Panel to be less proactive and effective, and these have been noted elsewhere (see Section 6.7).

APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

Dr Anne Martin (Panel Chairperson)
Higher Education Consultant
Melbourne
Australia

Prof. Pamela Abbott
Professor of Sociology,
School of Social Sciences,
University of Aberdeen,
UK

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

Dr Saleh Al Busaidi
Director of Language Centre
Sultan Qaboos University
Oman

Mr Hamoud Al Kharusi
Acting Director General for Education and Training
Ministry of Health
Oman

Tess Goodliffe (Executive Officer)
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

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.

ADAASR.....	Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research
AC.....	Academic Council
ADRI	A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising: Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.
Approach	The first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating what a HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to achieve it.
ARC	Admission and Registration Department
BoE	Board of Examiners
BoT	Board of Trustees
Call Back Interview.....	An interview conducted by the Audit Panel towards the end of the Audit Visit for which it has invited specific people, usually at short notice, to respond to particular issues on which the Panel will require assistance.
CAS	College of Applied Sciences
CC.....	College Council
CV.....	Curriculum Vitae
DAFA	Director of Administrative and Financial Affairs
Deployment	The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.
DG	Directorate General for the Colleges of Applied Sciences (within the Ministry of Higher Education)
DG-CAS	Director General of Colleges of Applied Sciences
DG-CD.....	Directorate General of Civil Defence
DS	Department of Services
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.
GFP	General Foundation Program
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 <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> for any given topic in order to achieve better <i>results</i> .

KPI.....	Key Performance Indicator
LRC.....	Learning Resource Centre
MoCS.....	Ministry of Civil Service (www.mocs.gov.om)
MoHE.....	Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
NZTEC.....	New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium
OAAA.....	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oac.gov.om)
OAAA Board.....	The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAC.....	Oman Accreditation Council (became OAAA in 2010)
OFI.....	Opportunity for improvement.
OMR.....	Omani rials
OQF.....	Oman Qualifications Framework.
Panel Chairperson.....	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member.....	An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
PD.....	Programme Director
PDP.....	Professional Development Programme
Portfolio.....	see <i>Quality Audit Portfolio</i> .
PR.....	Public Relations
QA.....	Quality Assurance
Quality Assurance.....	The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.
Quality Audit.....	An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision.
Quality Audit Portfolio.....	The report produced as the result of a self study. Also forms the main submission made to the OAAA by the HEI being audited.
Quality Audit Report.....	A public report published by the OAAA which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel's External Review of a HEI.
Quality Enhancement.....	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing <i>approach, deployment</i> and <i>results</i> .
Random Interview.....	An interview conducted <i>in situ</i> by individual Panel Members during the Audit but separately from the main interview sessions.
Results.....	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> .
sic.....	Referenced exactly from the source (even if the source contained errors or was ambiguous)
SIS.....	Student Information System
SRC.....	Scientific Research Committee
SRD.....	Scientific Research Department
SSC.....	Student Services Centre
System.....	In this Report, <i>system</i> refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.
TSCCC.....	Training and Student Careers Counselling Centre

NOTES

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