



**Oman Academic
Accreditation Authority**

**Report of an Audit of
Shinas College of Technology**

March 2013

Audit Report Number 32

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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 Shinas College of Technology (ShCT). It comments on ShCT'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 ShCT's activities, and constructive feedback to ShCT to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with ShCT undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarized in its Portfolio. This document was submitted to the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) by the due date of 14 March 2012.

The OAAA appointed an external Audit Panel (the 'Panel'), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the quality audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 10 April 2012 to consider ShCT's Portfolio. Following this, the Panel Chairperson's representative and the Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to ShCT on 23 April 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 ShCT's activities. No public submissions were received.

The audit visit took place over 3-6 June 2012. During this time, the Panel spoke with around 115 people, including representatives of the governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. It also visited campus facilities and reviewed a range of additional materials.

No information provided after 6 June 2012 (being the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit.

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

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 5 March 2013.

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/QAM_2008_FINAL2.pdf).

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

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

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

The second stage in the institutional accreditation process is Standards Assessment. This stage, which will take place about four years after the Quality Audit, does provide a summative assessment against external standards in the same nine areas of activity. It should be noted that Oman also operates a system of accreditation/recognition for academic programs, 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

Shinas College of Technology (ShCT) was established in 2005. The College is a public institution, serving both male and female students, and it offers Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in Engineering, Information Technology and Business Studies. The College has a student population of approximately 3676. It is one of seven Colleges of Technology (CoTs) governed and financed centrally through the Ministry of Manpower (MoM). All seven CoTs in the Sultanate of Oman operate under the MoM through the Undersecretary for Technological Education and Vocational Training and the Director General for Technological Education (DGTE). A Board of Trustees (BoT), chaired by the Minister of Manpower, oversees and advises on the strategic direction of all seven CoTs. A Technical Committee (TC) is responsible for strategy implementation across all CoTs, with the DGTE having executive responsibility for implementation of BoT decisions in each college.

The quality audit commenced with ShCT undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems, which led to the production of the Quality Audit Portfolio (Portfolio). The ShCT self-study was guided and facilitated by the Quality Assurance Department of the MoM as part of its role in supporting all colleges in the CoTs network in the development and assurance of quality measures. The Panel found that the ShCT Portfolio was written clearly and used the ADRI model for analysis (see Appendix B). A large amount of documentation was also made readily available. The Panel also learnt that a number of working groups from different departments and centers at ShCT contributed to the development of the ShCT Portfolio. However, data presented in the Portfolio seemed to rely heavily on satisfaction surveys.

All CoTs share the same governance structure which operates under the supervision of the MoM. All CoTs follow a similar institutional organizational structure, with some variation in management style. The Panel found that ShCT has formed a large number of committees which have been instrumental in supporting the management system at the College. However, the Panel noted a lack of succession planning for senior positions in the College and a rather rapid change in management positions in ShCT in the past few years including changes in the positions of Dean and Assistant Dean. It is worth noting that this has happened in a bid to introduce stability in the context of the wider social issues in the region at the time. ShCT, prior to the Audit Visit, had been focused on responding to student complaints rather than long-term planning. While there is a Strategic Plan for all CoTs, ShCT has its own strategic sub-goals which are aligned with the overall plan. The Panel noted the inclusive approach the College utilized in developing its strategic sub-goals.

The Graduate Attributes (GAs) of ShCT, derived from the Vision and Mission of the College, are common to all CoTs across Oman. The Panel heard from representatives of the industry and other stakeholders that ShCT graduates have a generally good reputation in the workplace. It was evident, however, that further attention is needed to ensure that all ShCT GAs are equally emphasized. In terms of program curricula, ShCT intends to initiate steps towards benchmarking its curricula with those of an institution outside the MoM. While the Panel supports this initiative, it also urges the College to take active steps to develop a formal, systematic approach to engage external individuals to moderate and review curricula and assessment practices. The College is also urged to take further steps to monitor employability rates and the effectiveness of its graduate tracking system.

As mentioned above, all CoTs in Oman share the same Mission and Vision. It was noted that there is currently a missing link between the Mission and Vision with regard to research status. While ShCT's prime Mission is to achieve and sustain excellence in teaching and learning, the Panel was of the view that some form of research is typically a core function of a higher education institution and that quality education and teaching practices should be evidence-based. The Panel encourages the College, in consultation with MoM, to work of resolving this gap between the College's Mission and Vision.

ShCT has developed commendable relationships with the local industry through its On-the-Job Training (OJT) program. Students and graduates interviewed by the Panel spoke positively about the ShCT's OJT program. ShCT is urged to now develop a College-level plan for the area of industry and community engagement in order to monitor progress in this area. In terms of the provision of academic support services, the College has identified an opportunity for improvement in relation to the provision of training in using all features of on-line registration and enhancing the registration process. The College also recognizes the need to expand the Library space and align Library services and resources in line with the Strategic Plan to respond to the anticipated increase in student intake. While the College has policies and procedures in place to support academic advising, it needs to review its current provision in order to ensure that students at risk can be identified and supported.

Students at ShCT enjoy a positive relationship with the College management. The Panel considers that the College is making considerable progress towards the achievement of high levels of student satisfaction. ShCT recognizes the need for continued improvement in the area of sports facilities and extracurricular activities and the Panel encourages the College to involve students in the planning and development for these new facilities. The Panel is aware that most of the improvement plans are still waiting for the MoM approval, especially for the recruitment of specialized staff in this area.

Staff at ShCT benefit from a formal localized induction program offered at College and department level. The Panel was encouraged by the introduction of a suite of schemes to recognize and reward outstanding performance by academic and administrative staff. The College now needs to review the current approach to performance appraisal to ensure that is linked to the professional development needs of administrative and teaching staff. In support of the ShCT Vision as the "College of Choice," ShCT states that it aims to provide support services and facilities to its College community but these need to be managed under an overarching plan. While ShCT recognizes and values the importance of public relations and marketing to support its status, reputation and image-building, it is urged to establish the planned media and marketing relation unit.

It should be noted that although there are many areas of commonality between the seven CoTs, each College undergoes its own separate Quality Audit. Therefore, the conclusions in the resulting reports may vary from one College to another.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Shinas College of Technology for the establishment of a committee system which is beginning to play a significant role in the functioning of the College. 13
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Shinas College of Technology for the level of staff participation and engagement in the development of policies and procedures across the College, which has resulted in positive impact on policy implementation. 16
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the initiatives undertaken by Shinas College of Technology to establish links and develop partnerships with local business and industry in order to enhance the student learning experience. 28

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Shinas College of Technology for the introduction of a suite of schemes to recognize and reward outstanding performance of academic and administrative staff..... 39

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to evaluate its risk management system and supports its efforts to put mechanism in place to monitor its effectiveness. 15
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to take measures to reduce academic dishonesty among students and supports its efforts in this regard. 22
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to establish more formal channels of communication with its alumni and supports its efforts to develop more coordinated and systematic activities to engage with graduates. 29
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to train students and staff in using all features of online registration, and supports its efforts to enhance the registration process..... 30
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to expand the Library space and align Library services and resources to the Strategic Plan to respond to the expected increase in student intake, and supports its efforts to seek funding for this from the Ministry of Manpower. 31
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to improve the provision of medical services to staff and students and supports its efforts to do so. 35
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority affirms that Shinas College of Technology needs to enhance its social and recreational services for students and encourages the College, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, to provide such services to male and female students alike. 36
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to improve its College level induction, and supports its efforts to provide ongoing high quality induction experiences. 38
9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to continue offering targeted professional development opportunities for academic and administrative staff, and supports its efforts to plan and execute these. 38

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, develops and implements a plan to develop the College's research profile in line with its Vision and supported by the necessary resources..... 11
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement comprehensive systems to evaluate and report on the role and effectiveness of the existing governance bodies in supporting the College's operations and aspirations. 12
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement mechanisms to enhance the College's autonomy in key areas such as staff recruitment in order to enable it to meet its strategic objectives..... 12
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in coordination of Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement a systematic approach to succession planning in order to minimize disruption when senior management is changed..... 13
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in coordination with the Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement a transparent and consistent appraisal system for senior staff..... 13
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology ensure compliance with the Health and Safety Policy and to improve emergency evacuation procedures across the campus..... 17
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology increase awareness, understanding and application of its designated Graduate Attributes among students, staff and stakeholders..... 19
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology take further steps to monitor the employability rates of its graduates and update the College's graduate tracking mechanisms..... 24
9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology develop and implement a College-level plan for the area of industry and community engagement and monitor progress in line with proposed indicators and targets..... 27
10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology review the planning and management of its academic support services in order to ensure a consistent approach in this area which meets the needs of the College community..... 30
11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology review its current provision of academic advising to ensure that staff have adequate time and support to carry out this duty and that the relationship between academic advising on student progression and retention rates is monitored..... 32
12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, ensure that plans for any increase in student enrollment are aligned with current and future teaching resource provision..... 32
13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology ensure that feedback from review activities such as student surveys is used for

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| planning and decision-making purposes and that students are informed of actions taken in response to their feedback..... | 34 |
| 14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology review the current approach to performance appraisal to ensure that the feedback loop is closed and that the appraisal is linked to professional development needs of academic and administrative staff. | 38 |
| 15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology implement mechanisms to monitor and respond to staff grievances which are clearly communicated to all staff..... | 39 |
| 16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology develop and implement a strategic approach to overseeing its facilities to ensure effective management, monitoring and upgrade where necessary. | 41 |
| 17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology develop a comprehensive approach to marketing and implement its plans to establish a marketing and media relation unit in order to raise the profile of the College and its graduates. | 41 |

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Shinas College of Technology (ShCT), established in 2005, is one of seven public Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman overseen by the Ministry of Manpower (MoM). These Colleges are governed by common College Bylaws, developed by the MoM, the Board of Trustees (BoT), and the Technical Committee. According to ShCT, this governance system promotes a collaborative relationship between ShCT and other CoTs (Portfolio, p.9). It creates opportunities for all CoTs to share good practices and proposes solutions for any difficulties arising during the implementation of academic programs and other operational requirements. ShCT states that this also presents challenges for the College as it has to make its practices more effective and transparent (Portfolio p.10). The College is managed internally by the Dean and the College Council. A number of College committees and a Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) have been constituted to improve College operations and activities (Portfolio, p.11).

It is worth noting that during the self-review, the College went through management instability with a newly appointed Dean and a later appointment of an Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs. Moreover, due to its location, ShCT was affected by the wider social issues in the region in 2011. This was an important context for the Panel's consideration of specific areas in this Chapter such as management, entity and activity review, student grievances, as well as other areas in subsequent chapters. The Panel found that the management focus at the time of the self-review was on settling down students and addressing their needs rather than on long term issues that might be expected of an institution that has reached a steady state of development. This Chapter considers the Panel's conclusions on the key areas of governance and management, including strategic and operational planning; financial, policy and risk management; entity and activity review systems, student grievance process, and health and safety.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

The College Mission, Vision and Values statements are shared by the seven CoTs and were developed centrally by the MoM Quality Assurance Department (QAD) in May 2005 with input from all CoTs. These were reviewed by Deans of CoTs in 2006 and 2008 (Portfolio, p.7 and p.12). The Vision, Mission and Values are explicitly stated in the Strategic Plan 2009-2012:

Mission

The mission of the ShCT is to achieve and sustain a strong reputation for excellence in teaching and learning. The College is dedicated to the delivery of high quality technological education and aims to produce graduates who have the professional and personal skills to enter employment with confidence, contributing effectively to the Sultanate's ongoing economic development.

Vision

The College of Technology intends to become the "College of Choice" for students and for industry by providing demonstratively high quality teaching, learning and research that make a significant contribution to on-going national economic development.

Values

Professionalism: a commitment to strive tirelessly to deliver high quality student-centered technological education;

Integrity: honesty, fairness and openness to constructive criticism;

Accountability: awareness of the staff about their collective responsibility towards Omani society;

Flexibility: willingness to learn, to develop new skills, and to take new responsibilities;

Creativity: full recognition of the value of innovation in all areas of the College work;

Tolerance and teamwork: readiness to work effectively with others, regardless of background, and recognize and welcome cultural diversity;

Communication: commitment to the effective exchange of information (inside and outside of the College) to foster goodwill, and to support efficiency. (Strategic Plan, p.2).

The Panel found that the Mission, Vision and Values were adequately communicated to staff by various means. When closely examining specific aspects of the Mission, the Panel heard during interviews with from several external stakeholders that the College graduates' professional skills are adequate to take up their careers confidently. However, during interviews with various stakeholders, comments were made suggesting that students' soft skills, mainly communication and commitment, need further attention (see Section 2.1).

Examining the notion of "College of Choice" in the Vision of the CoTs, as applied to ShCT, it was found that students select the College for several reasons such as proximity to their residence and the fact that their school level General Education Diplomas qualify them to enroll in CoTs, not in other higher education institutions (HEIs) that require higher grades. Almost all the students the Panel interviewed reported that ShCT was among the students' first three HEI choices. The Panel heard that the College is committed to providing high quality teaching and learning opportunities which would support the ShCT to be "College of Choice". Nevertheless, more data needs to be collected to support this claim.

In its Vision, ShCT aspires to provide demonstrably high quality research. The College acknowledges that the link between the Vision and Mission with regard to research is missing (Portfolio, p.8) and it is not a priority for the College, as the College's current focus is on teaching and learning (Portfolio, p.42). The Panel learnt that there is an intention from the MoM and the College to strengthen this area. The Panel takes the view that some form of research is typically a core function of an HEI and that quality education and teaching practices should be evidence-based.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, develops and implements a plan to develop the College's research profile in line with its Vision and supported by the necessary resources.

1.2 Governance

The College's governance and functions are guided by the College Bylaws. As per the Bylaws, ShCT is governed by a BoT which is responsible for all seven CoTs in Oman. The BoT is chaired by the Minister of Manpower and includes the Undersecretary of Technical Education and Vocational Training; representatives from Ministries and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Director General for Technological Education (DGTE); two CoT Deans and representatives from the industry. The BoT is responsible for setting up strategies and policies and following up their implementation. The seven Deans of the CoTs are all members of the Technical Committee, which is also referred to as Deans Council, chaired by the DGTE. The Technical Committee looks into issues arising from the implementation of programs and the operational requirements and makes recommendations to the Undersecretary (Portfolio, pp.9-10). The College Council, which is chaired by the Dean, is responsible for internal decision-making (see Section 1.3).

The agendas and minutes of the last three meetings of the BoT and the Technical Committee, reviewed by the Panel, illustrated decision-making over a range of topics such as types of specializations and the level of study to be offered. In terms of following up the implementation of decisions, the Panel was informed that the BoT is provided with regular feedback on the College's progress. The Panel learnt that a summary of all OAAA audit reports of CoTs audited to date, together with an action plan have been presented to the BoT. As there is no formal follow up mechanism in place the Panel was informed that the BoT would benefit from having a secretariat to facilitate its work and to follow up. The Panel noted that there is no mechanism in place to assess the effectiveness of the BoT. This is an area that will need to be reviewed.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement comprehensive systems to evaluate and report on the role and effectiveness of the existing governance bodies in supporting the College's operations and aspirations.

The relationship between the BoT and the Technical Committee at the MoM level and the College Council at ShCT was probed in order to establish to what extent and in what areas the local College management has the authority to make decisions regarding finance, administrative issues and human resource matters. It was found that the College has authority to manage its allocated budget and to make day-to-day decisions. However, the Panel was informed that the biggest challenge the College has is the limited autonomy in relation to recruitment and termination of staff contracts as these are controlled centrally by the MoM. The Panel urges the College, in consultation with the MoM, to review and address the challenges faced in this area in order to enable it to meet its strategic objectives.

Recommendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement mechanisms to enhance the College's autonomy in key areas such as staff recruitment in order to enable it to meet its strategic objectives.

1.3 Management

The highest authority in ShCT rests with the Dean and the College Council (CC). The Dean is the chairperson of CC and reports to the DGTE. He is assisted in carrying out his duties by an Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA), an Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA) and an Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADAF) (Portfolio, p.10).

The Panel was informed that the College management has been subject to frequent changes of Dean in the past few years. The current Dean was holding the position of ADAA in addition to carrying out the duties of the Dean for about eight months. He was officially appointed as a Dean in April 2012. The newly appointed ADAA was recruited from another College and joined ShCT just a few days before the audit visit took place. It is worth noting that the Dean has taken measures to bring the College back to a state of stability, particularly in relation to systemizing processes such as addressing students' needs through the student grievance process and establishing industrial links and benchmarking committees. The Panel noted, however, that the College does not have a systematic approach to succession planning. This needs attention from the College in consultation with the MoM.

Recommendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in coordination of Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement a systematic approach to succession planning in order to minimize disruption when senior management is changed.

The College claims that it is committed to providing excellent administration and management (Portfolio, p.10). The Strategic Plan sub-goals 2.1, 2.5, and 2.6 state: “ensure effective operation of College Council and Board, clarify the roles and responsibilities for each member of the organization, and improve channels of communication”. The Panel learnt that each staff member has a job description with delineated responsibilities and outcomes.

The Panel examined the minutes of past meetings of the College Council and found that the College Council meetings had not been attended by external members from industry as per the College Bylaws. The Panel was informed that the external members of the College Council were involved for one term initially. The College did not renew these roles, as the external members found it difficult to attend regular meetings of the College Council. As members from industry had only recently joined the College Council, the Panel could not reflect on their contribution to the planning and decision-making processes. The Panel was informed that the external members of the College Council do not receive incentives; this may be among the factors for limited participation and contribution in the College Council in the past. This is a situation that could be reviewed by the College, in conjunction with the MoM.

The Panel noted that ShCT has constituted 15 committees with the intention to improve the College administration and operations (Portfolio, p.11; ShCT Quality Assurance Manual (QAM) section 2.7). Each committee has a clearly articulated membership and well-communicated terms of reference. The performance and progress of these committees is monitored by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) (Portfolio, p.11). The Panel examined sample meeting minutes of the Policy Development Committee, Specialization Committee, and Investigation Committee and found that a range of issues were discussed and decisions were made. During interviews with members of these committees, the Panel noted their level of engagement and understanding of respective tasks. The Panel formed the view that the formation of various committees promotes staff accountability towards College development and contributes positively to the management of ShCT.

Commendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Shinas College of Technology for the establishment of a committee system which is beginning to play a significant role in the functioning of the College.

In an attempt to learn more about the appraisal system of College senior staff, the Panel was informed that at this juncture there is no formal, transparent performance appraisal system in place to assess the Dean’s performance. Currently, the MoM tracks performance through College reports and achievements. While it in itself may provide some sense of the general performance of a given College, the Panel is of the view that a more transparent and consistent approach to appraising College deans is needed. The Panel was informed that there is a limited pool from which to appoint people to the Dean’s position.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in coordination with the Ministry of Manpower, develop and implement a transparent and consistent appraisal system for senior staff.

1.4 ***Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance***

The ShCT has no affiliations for its programs. However, the College has direct and open channels with QAD at the MoM, which provides guidance in quality assurance matters.

1.5 ***Strategic Plan***

The CoT Strategic Plan 2009-2012, which is common to all seven Colleges, guides and directs the operations of ShCT. Prior to this plan, the QAD had developed the draft Strategic Plan 2006-2008 with input from CoTs. The CoTs agreed to retain the same Mission, Vision and values from the Strategic Plan 2006-2008 for the Strategic Plan 2009-2012. The College strategic sub-goals (2009-2012) are aligned with the eight overall strategic goals. These sub-goals, which direct the overall operations of the College, were developed through consultation via a workshop attended by College staff and achievements are being tracked through key performance indicators (Portfolio, p.6 and p.13). The sub-goals were approved by the QAD, then by the College Council.

The departments developed their operational plans by extracting the relevant goals and sub-goals from the Strategic Plan (Portfolio, p.8). These goals were incorporated into departmental operational plans. The departments report on achievements against KPIs (ShCT Annual Reports 2010-2011). The Panel was informed that a comprehensive assessment of all indicators will be conducted by the end of 2012. Findings will inform the identification of future strategic priority goals and will guide the development of future plans. In the absence of such an assessment of indicators, the MoM and the College senior management stated that the current Strategic Plan will be extended for another year, until 2013.

1.6 ***Operational Planning***

The College states that the operational plans were developed at the departmental level via working groups as per the protocol specified in the QAM (Portfolio, p.14). Close examination of departmental plans indicated a strong alignment between the Strategic Plan and departmental operational plans. The use of working groups provided a wide level of engagement and ownership of the process.

Reporting progress against the operational plan has been carried out at departmental level on a yearly basis (ShCT Annual Reports 2010-2011). The Panel noted that performance is approaching the targets set in the Strategic Plan 2009-2012 except for sub-goals related to benchmarking, external advisory boards for programs and course review and links with professional bodies. These areas need further attention from the College.

1.7 ***Financial Management***

ShCT has an operational budget and a developmental budget; both are controlled and allocated by the MoM. Allocation of the ShCT operational budget is based on previous year expenditure and the developmental budget is based on needs and requirements of centers and departments (Portfolio, p.15). Financial planning is under the supervision of ADAFA who receives plans from the Head of Finance Department with input from centers and departments. The College Council reviews the needs and recommends priorities while the College Finance Committee checks that purchased items conform to the specifications.

The Panel was informed by the MoM that the operational budget for each CoT is decided by the Ministry of Finance (MoF); however, there are occasions where the MoF does not take the increase in student intake into consideration. The operational budget covers staff salaries, student allowances and purchase of equipment and learning resources. This budget is not linked to the Strategic Plan. On the other hand, the developmental budget is related to infrastructure development and equipment in labs and workshops. The Panel learnt that the developmental

budget depends on College needs and plans approved by the Technical Committee. Moreover, the Panel was informed that the priority of the developmental budget at present is expanding the infrastructure at ShCT. The Panel was informed that the MoM has been able to secure additional funds from the government to meet the developmental needs of ShCT and other CoTs in addition to the developmental budget. These additional resources will help to fund the construction of a new building at ShCT, which will be ready by March 2013. The Panel was told that the new building would create a 35% increase in space. In interviews with MoM personnel and College staff, the Panel learnt that the ShCT budget depends entirely on the government funds. At the time of the audit, ShCT could not earn income and its link with industry is limited to partnership.

The staff who were interviewed stated that they have some authority in processing the College budget. In addition, in case of any financial deficits due to inflation rates, the MoM is responding to requests for budget reallocation from surplus accounts. For example it was reported that a deficit in students' allowance account was resolved in one week. Despite the ShCT budget being centrally allocated, the Panel learnt that this does not create any problem for the College.

1.8 ***Risk Management***

ShCT has recognized the need for an effective risk management system (Portfolio, p.16, ShCT Strategic Plan 2009-2012). There is a designated College Risk Officer (CRO) at the College. A Risk Management Committee chaired by the CRO with representatives from all departments has recently been constituted. The responsibilities of this committee are outlined in the QAM (Section 2.7.4). The Panel learnt that the College common risk management policy, developed by QAD and implemented across all CoTs, was customized by ShCT to meet local College needs as evidenced in the risk assessment template and committee responsibilities.

The Panel learnt from the staff who were interviewed that each department maintains a risk register and reports the risks encountered to the CRO. Through examination of the risk management policy, the scope of the risk management committee and the risk management plan, the Panel concluded that the College needs to evaluate its risk management system in relation to its effectiveness in mitigating risks. The Panel learnt that the College intends to improve the system through benchmarking with other CoTs. ShCT has also started inviting feedback and suggestions from staff on possible risks. The Panel supports this intention.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to evaluate its risk management system and supports its efforts to put mechanism in place to monitor its effectiveness.

1.9 ***Policy Management***

ShCT strategic sub-goal 2.2 states: "*Provide effective Policy Management System (PMS)*". The Panel observed that the College has made considerable progress towards fulfilling this sub-goal. A designated Policy Management Team (PMT) in accordance with the QAM (Section 2) was constituted. It is chaired by the ADAFA with Department Policy Coordinators as members. The terms of reference are outlined in the QAM (Section 2.7.12). The Panel learnt that training was conducted by QAD to explain the elements of the PMS and the process of policy development (Portfolio, p.17). The College states that a suite of new policies were developed and current policies were reviewed through consultation via meetings conducted by the PMT, the departmental committees and College committees (Portfolio, p.17).

The Panel noted that the College Handbook outlined the details of each policy; its name, effective date, status, purpose, scope of application, policy content, procedure, references,

contact person, the procedure to be followed, the level of staff participation in developing new policies and revision of the current policies. The Panel takes the view that the policies should have a revision date. The Panel confirmed that staff members were actively involved in developing and reviewing policies and they were made aware of policies such as the advising policy, assessment policy, induction policy, and moderation policy.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Shinas College of Technology for the level of staff participation and engagement in the development of policies and procedures across the College, which has resulted in positive impact on policy implementation.

1.10 *Entity and Activity Review Systems*

The strategic Sub-goal 2.7 which states: “*Establish an annual review cycle*” guides the ShCT review activities. The College outlined a variety of review activities that are undertaken to inform management about ShCT operations. It has designated self-assessment groups comprising staff from all the centers and departments. These groups identified strengths and weaknesses of all areas of College operations. Moreover, regular internal audits were conducted by the MoM QAD (Portfolio, p.17). The Panel noted that the self-assessment groups have carried out a wide range of surveys using the ADRI cycle to propose improvements, in consultation with the Consultative Survey Committee, to obtain feedback on many aspects of the College’s operations (Portfolio, p.18, and ShCT General Survey Report, p.?) such as student feedback on course evaluation, facilities and supplies, academic advising and feedback on program evaluation (see Section 7.3).

The Panel examined a sample of documents that are used to inform College management on the College operations, such as annual reports, and KPI achievement reports. The Panel noted that these documents highlight achievements and areas for improvement. In an attempt to learn more about the indicators that MoM used to assess institutional performance, the Panel was provided with several examples of these indicators which include dropout rate, staff retention and turnover rate, resource utilization, employment rate. However, the Panel was informed that there is a need to institute a systematic assessment system to examine issues related to institutional performance, and perhaps to form an external review team. The Panel supports this initiative.

1.11 *Student Grievance Process*

ShCT grievance process is guided by the Sub-goal 7.1 strategy 7.1.4: “*improve student grievance process*” which enforces articles 73 to 75 of the Bylaws of CoTs. The College has framed a student grievance policy. During interviews with students and staff, the Panel was able to assess that the grievance process was well understood. Reviewing the documents on student grievances and student grievance data, the Panel concluded that the process is appropriate. The Panel was also informed that the College intends to review grievance forms and upload them in the College website and create electronic channels for communicating grievances with the intention to improve the process. Creating new channels of communication regarding student grievances would help minimize the issue raised by students in interviews who stated that they do not get instant feedback about their grievances.

1.12 *Health and Safety*

The health and safety measures of the College are guided by the Bylaws and Goal 8 of the Strategic Plan which focuses on the management, effectiveness and use of facilities. The College Sub-Goal 8.2 relevant to this area states: “*ensure college facilities comply with the health and safety standards of Oman*”. The College has undertaken several steps towards this

goal, including developing the College Health and Safety Policy. At the departmental level, there are substantial health and safety guidelines for laboratories/workshops (such as an Engineering Quality Assurance Manual).

There is a designated Health and Safety Committee chaired by the ADAFA and representatives from various departments, Head of Human Resources (HR), Head of Educational Technology Center, a representative from Housing, and Student Activities and Graduation Department and a representative from QAU. The responsibilities of this committee are outlined in the QAM. Safety training has been conducted for staff and students. The results of the staff feedback survey indicate the need for improvement, including a comprehensive induction and training in health and safety. The Panel observed that in some labs there were safety issues related to emergency evacuation and ventilation.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology ensure compliance with the Health and Safety Policy and to improve emergency evacuation procedures across the campus.

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

ShCT does not oversee any associated entities. Therefore this section does not apply.

2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMMES

ShCT has three academic departments: Engineering, Information Technology and Business Studies. The Engineering Department offers three programs which are all taught in English: Mechanical, Electrical and Civil engineering up to Advanced Diploma levels. Currently, Civil Engineering offers only Diploma level programs as the department is relatively new. The IT Department offers specialization programs only at the Advanced Diploma level (Portfolio, p.2). The specializations currently offered are Database, Internet and E-Security, Networking, and Software Engineering. The Business Studies Department offers two specialization programs up to Advanced Diploma level in Human Resources (HR) and Accounting. All awards are given on a credit-based system. Students entering the College take a placement test and are placed on the General Foundation Program (GFP) in order to prepare them for their studies (Portfolio, p.24). The teaching and learning practices at ShCT are guided by the following College strategic goals (2, 4, and 6):

- *Offer all students high quality teaching, learning, and training opportunities in line with the requirements of the market needs.*
- *Keep up with modern developments in technology through analysis of market needs in curriculum review process.*
- *Provide society with graduates who are equipped with appropriate technological knowledge and personal/professional skills according to international standards. (Portfolio, p.12 and p.22)*

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

2.1 *Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives*

ShCT is dedicated to producing graduates who have the professional and personal skills to enter employment with confidence. The Graduate Attributes (GAs) of ShCT, derived from the Vision and Mission of the College, are common to CoTs across Oman (Portfolio, p.22). These attributes are:

Disciplined individuals; application of knowledge and skills; critical thinking; competence in information technology; professional competence; effective communication; good interpersonal relationship; life-long learning; social responsibility; commitment; entrepreneurial skills (ShCT Quality Assurance Manual, p.94).

ShCT states that GAs are incorporated into the programs and curricula via mapping of course learning outcomes with GAs by Heads of Centers and Departments, course coordinators and course teachers (Portfolio, p.22). The College claims that On-the-Job Training (OJT) helps in developing the practical skills of the students through work-based training (see Section 2.7). The skills and work-based competencies required of OJT (OJT Assessment Record Book) support the attainment of GAs.

Based on the review of the evidence on mapping of work-based learning outcomes of Electrical Engineering against GAs and the inspection of the College survey, and from interviews with staff and stakeholders, the Panel concluded that the learning outcomes were clearly linked to ShCT's GAs. However, employers and representatives of the industry have reported that commitment, interpersonal skills, critical thinking and graduates' communication skills, need

further attention. From the interviews with the College staff, students, and stakeholders, it became clear to the Panel that there is a lack of awareness of all GAs among the students, staff and stakeholders who were interviewed.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology increase awareness, understanding and application of its designated Graduate Attributes among students, staff and stakeholders.

2.2 Curriculum

According to the ShCT's Bylaws, the development of specialization programs and curricula is supervised centrally by the Directorate General of Technological Education and approved by the Board of Trustees (BoT). The College claims that technological education is in line with the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) and the Omani government's developmental plans (Portfolio, p.24). The existing academic programs of the CoTs were developed in 2003 and were subjected to frequent reviews with input from academic staff from the CoTs and industry experts. The CoTs specialization curricula are regularly reviewed and revised by the MoM specialization committees (Portfolio, p.24).

ShCT claims that it sets clear strategies, relating to curriculum development and review, for the sub-goal 1.4 "*ensure effective delivery of the courses and programs*", and sub-goal 1.5 "*ensure that programs are in line with market needs*" (Strategic Plan 2009-2012). The College states that the academic departments ensure relevance and functionality of the curricula through periodic revisions of the programs and the Department Academic Council reviews programs based on feedback from students, staff, employers and OJT training providers, and forwards recommendations to the College Council (Portfolio, pp.25-26).

The Panel learnt of a number of examples of curriculum and program changes such as discontinuing the Mechatronics program and the offering of a Civil Engineering program. Sections 4.7, 4.8, and 4.9 of the Quality Assurance Manual (QAM) detailed the structure of academic programs, the approval, monitoring, and review processes of programs and courses. The documents reviewed by the Panel indicated that the processes of program and course review and development are clear. However, the Panel noted limited involvement of stakeholders in curriculum building and design of the new programs. It is the Panel's view that involvement of relevant industry and employer representation could substantially add to the value and perception of quality of the courses offered at the College.

The College described how course teachers prepare course delivery plans that include the mapping of GAs with course learning outcomes, references books, e-brary references, and relevant websites (Portfolio, p.25). The Panel learnt that the post GFP English courses and the post GFP specialization courses use course materials prepared by course lecturers (Portfolio, pp.25-26).

The Panel noted that ShCT intends to initiate steps towards benchmarking its curricula with those of an institution outside the MoM. The Panel supports this initiative and suggests that ShCT set up an action plan with a specified time frame. The IT Specialization Committee started its plan to review and revise the curriculum of the IT programs of all CoTs in Semester 1, in the academic year 2010-2011. Sub-committees were formed based on specializations and ShCT is a member of the sub-committee for internet and E-Security. The sub-committees reviewed and revised the program outcomes, learning outcomes of each course, and a "degree audit" based on feedback from industry and alumni (Portfolio, p.26).

The College indicates that 100% of the course materials of all courses offered in the academic year 2010-2011 were reviewed and updated and 100% of courses outcomes were assessed (Portfolio, p.26). Nevertheless, the College plans to periodically review courses and curricula to meet the changing needs of the labor market (Portfolio, p.27). The Panel supports ShCT's intention of periodical course and curricula revisions.

2.3 ***Student Entry Standards***

The number of students to be admitted, admission criteria for the CoTs, and the minimum mark for acceptance to a specialization are determined centrally by the MoM (Portfolio, p.27). Admission of students for all CoTs is carried out centrally by the Higher Education Admission Center. The Panel learnt that a decision had been recently made to increase the size of intake in the academic year 2012/2013; nevertheless, ShCT does not know the exact number yet. The Panel is of the view that lack of information about the size of intake would affect the College planning process of its needs and resources (see Section 6.7). During interviews, the Panel inquired about the impact of an increase in student intake on admission standards. The Panel was informed it is unlikely that the admission standards or the exit criteria will be lowered but the interviewees expected a higher dropout rate. Moreover, the Panel learnt that the Deans' Council was concerned because of limited classrooms and resources. MoM is intending to provide additional physical facilities and support to students who will be admitted with the minimum criteria through increasing student advising and guidance and possibly extending the GFP.

A common theme arising from discussions with students is that they are attracted to ShCT because of the College's proximity to their residence, and because their marks in the school General Education Diploma fit the admission criteria. The Panel was informed that although the admission criteria for both male and female students are the same, the marks of accepted male students are much lower than those of female students. Generally, the Panel formed an impression that the MoM and the College management are keen to provide all possible help and guidance for students to overcome any learning challenges that they may encounter upon admission to the College.

2.4 ***General Foundation Program***

Upon admission, students are required to take the GFP if they do not meet the entry requirements for higher studies. The College Bylaws outline entry requirements, the registration process, progression from one level to the next, and admission requirements for various specializations. The GFP comprises English, Study Skills, Computing and Mathematics over four levels and students are placed in one of the levels based on their performance in a Placement Test. IT and Mathematics for Foundation are offered in either Intermediate or Advanced level depending on the availability of resources (Portfolio, p.28).

The College stated that most of the students taking the English Placement Test were placed at the Pre-elementary level and Elementary level (Portfolio, p.28). This indicates that the majority of students enrolled in ShCT have a very low proficiency in English. During the interviews, the staff confirmed the very low level of students' language ability at entry level. The Panel learnt that the 2003 English Placement Test version is currently used, however, a new version has been piloted and the results are being analyzed. Moreover, the Panel learnt that Exit Level tests are being developed in the College. The Panel agrees that there is a need to review the English Placement Test in the light of the College's GFP now being aligned to Oman's national GFP learning outcome standards.

2.5 *Teaching Quality*

The QAM of the College contains a section on teaching quality (section 4.3) that indicates the College's aspiration to provide quality teaching. ShCT acknowledges that *"the quality of teaching is clearly a factor in the success of all programs in providing students with the skills they need to succeed in the modern world"* (ShCT QAM, p.49). In its 2009-2012 Strategic Plan, ShCT has the following goals which are of particular relevance to teaching:

- *Offer all students high quality teaching, learning, and training opportunities in line with the requirements of market needs.*
- *Develop staff, offering opportunities for professional and personal growth and development, rewarding hard work and fostering leadership skills and innovative thinking.*
- *Keep up with modern developments in technology through analysis of market needs in curriculum review process. (Strategic Plan 2009-2012)*

To attain these goals, ShCT has developed sub-goals with key performance indicators (KPIs). The College states that a sufficient number of qualified and competent teaching staff and technicians are recruited based on criteria set by the MoM (Portfolio, pp.29-30). In addition to that, ShCT has policies on staff development and staff appraisal, which include student evaluation of teaching and staff development programs.

ShCT states that it has already put a pedagogical framework into practice (Portfolio, p.29) and is of the view that this framework would help in supporting students to attain the GAs. The College states that staff use a variety of student-centered teaching and learning methods such as lectures, small group discussions, case studies, role plays, field visits, e-learning (using Moodle as a learning management system). The Panel noted that ShCT has varied means to evaluate teaching such as observation by the HoS/HoD, student evaluation, peer evaluation, program evaluation, and student consultation with teachers (Portfolio, pp.30-31). These teaching and evaluation practices were confirmed by the teaching staff members who were interviewed. Based on the feedback data collected by student evaluations, the Panel supports the College's intention to improve lecturers' ability to stimulate students' interest in the subject matter; however, the Panel did not find evidence to support this intention.

Regarding teaching staff qualifications, it was found that the majority of teaching staff (87%) holds Master's degrees, 12% have a doctorate degrees, and they are from 19 different countries (Portfolio, p.76). The Panel was informed by students who were interviewed that they value the diversity of teachers, and their contribution to students' learning; however, they reported that more practical teaching is required. From the interviews, and the examination of a sample of course files that were prepared by the teaching staff, the Panel appreciated the initiatives ShCT has developed to inform course teachers and HoSs on the level of teaching effectiveness and criteria used to evaluate learning outcomes.

Students consult the staff to discuss questions or problems, which provides them with the opportunity to practice their communication skills outside the classroom and an opportunity for teachers to give feedback to students on their learning. Students on the GFP have one hour of consultation per course per week. Staff use advisory sessions to discuss issues pertaining to academic activities of students enrolled in post GFP courses.

2.6 *Plagiarism*

The term 'plagiarism' is used by ShCT to mean "the act of claiming that academic work is one's own, when in fact it is taken directly from other sources without this fact being stated" (QAM, section 7.3.1). This is in line with the College Bylaws that mandate staff to respect physical and intellectual properties and rights of others (Portfolio, p.32). The College plagiarism

policy was approved by the Quality Assurance Department (QAD), and the College Bylaws outline actions to be taken in cases of plagiarism.

ShCT claims that guidelines for avoiding plagiarism were included in the course delivery plans and that staff and students were educated regarding plagiarism and its detection through handouts and workshops (Portfolio, p.32). This was confirmed by both students and staff who reported that plagiarism conditions are stated in the assignments and students are also informed orally. In addition, the College has purchased the license for “Turnitin”, software for detecting verbatim copying.

The College states that “no plagiarism cases have been reported yet” (Portfolio, p.32); however, the Panel was informed that some recent cases were detected and resulted in students failing the course. From the meetings with academic staff, the Panel noticed that awareness of how to minimize cheating during the written exams is well identified by the College but more awareness is still needed on mechanisms to detect plagiarism after submission of written work/projects or essays to deal with plagiarism that may occur in assignments.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to take measures to reduce academic dishonesty among students and supports its efforts in this regard.

2.7 Student Placements

ShCT recognizes the value of providing work experience for its students. On-the-Job-Training (OJT) is a vital component of the curricula of all programs of CoTs (Bylaws, article 67). It gives students exposure to work-related experiences in preparation for employment in the future. The College sub-goal 5.1 “*develop and sustain relationship with the public and private organization*” and related strategies (strategic goals 5.1.1 and 5.1.2) foster the implementation of OJT.

The implementation of OJT in all CoTs, including ShCT, is supervised and monitored by the Industrial Link Department of the MoM. However, the industrial links for the College are coordinated by the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA). The departmental OJT coordinator, in collaboration with the College assessors and OJT supervisors, monitors the implementation of OJT programs (Portfolio, p.32). The Panel noted that there is a three-fold increase in the number of companies the College has established links with since the academic year 2008/2009 (Portfolio, p.33). However, during the interviews, the Panel was informed that opportunities for OJT may be limited in the event of an increase in student intake. Generally, the Panel received positive feedback from the interviewees representing organizations involved with OJT. The Panel was informed that many companies employ former OJT students from ShCT as they are impressed with their attitude and readiness for the workplace.

The Panel found that ShCT has a well-defined process for OJT that includes: establishing links with companies; orienting students, OJT supervisors and College assessors; monitoring and assessing students’ experiences; providing feedback; and students reflection on experiences gained. Although 100% of work-based training was aligned with all specializations, 5% of IT Diploma training was not aligned (Portfolio p.34). The College intends to work towards finding OJT placements relevant to students’ specializations and the Panel supports its efforts in this area.

2.8 *Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation*

All academic departments in ShCT ensure that assessments are conducted based on a set of examination standards (QAM, section 7.1). In managing the examinations and maintaining consistency in the moderation of exam papers, the academic departments are guided by the Examination Policy and Moderation Policy. ShCT has a system of double-marking of examination scripts as spelt out in the Moderation Policy. This is done before the marks are approved by the College Council (Portfolio, p.34). Students can appeal against final exam results as per the College Bylaws.

In reviewing the supporting materials related to students' appeal for final exams, the Panel noted various cases in which students marks were changed due to final exam appeals. The Panel urges ShCT to enhance the existing double-marking system of the examination scripts to maintain reliability of results. The Panel heard from some students (especially in the IT Department) that assessments mostly require them to recall theoretical information rather than reflecting on practical experience. This may be an area for the College to consider.

2.9 *Academic Security and Invigilation*

ShCT's mechanism for ensuring academic security and integrity in all examinations is outlined in the College Bylaws. The Dean, assisted by the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, monitors the process of preparation of examinations, the physical security and administration of examinations. There is a designated College Examination Committee which is responsible for preparing examination and invigilation schedules. The examination and invigilation practices are guided by the College Examination Policy and the examination and invigilation procedures (Portfolio, p.35).

The academic departments and the English Language Center (ELC) ensure security of exam papers prior to the commencement of examinations through procedures such as not storing examination questions on the hard disks of computers in shared networks. In the academic departments, the Examination Committee or the course coordinator makes copies of the question papers, secures them in the Office of the HoD/HoC ELC and distributes them to the invigilators just before the exams. After the exams are over, students' answer scripts are given to the respective course teachers for marking. After the results are released, the answer scripts are kept in secure lockers by the Examination Committee. For practical examinations, students save their files in their personal accounts on the College file server. All files in their accounts are shifted to another file server before the examination. Directly after the examination, the network is closed and the files are downloaded by the respective course teachers for marking (Portfolio, p.36). During interviews with academic staff involved in invigilation of the examinations, and from reviewing the survey of staff on academic security and invigilation, the Panel was of the view that there is an awareness of the procedures and actions to be taken in cases of student malpractice during the examinations. However, the record of cheating indicates an increase in cheating incidences, despite the varied ways instigated to inform students of the consequences of cheating. The College is promoting the concept of honesty and integrity using a number of strategies such as sending SMS to students regarding relevant College Bylaws regarding cheating (see Affirmation 2).

2.10 *Student Retention and Progression*

The progression of students described in the College Bylaws is determined by the Cumulative Grade Point Average. ShCT uses the MoM centralised system to generate semester-wise lists of students who are moving to the next level or OJT. In addition, the College has a mechanism for tracking the retention and progression of students per level per semester. According to data presented in the Portfolio, from academic year 2008-2009 to academic year 2010-2011, the retention rate amongst post-Foundation students was 92% with an average progression rate of

74% (Portfolio, p.38). For GFP students, the College has identified that there has been a higher drop out rate amongst students studying at Elementary and Intermediate levels and the College intends to investigate the reasons for this. ShCT also states that it intends to improve student retention and progression at all levels in order to identify, support and counsel at risk students (Portfolio, p.39). The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area.

2.11 ***Graduate Destinations and Employability***

ShCT intends to “*provide society with graduates who are equipped with appropriate technological knowledge and personal/professional skills according to international standards*” (Goal 6, Strategic Plan). To attain this, the College intends to provide a career guidance service; invite companies to participate in job fairs; invite experts from industries to deliver lectures; collect feedback about the graduates' knowledge and skills from the employers; and conduct personality development programs and workshops for the students before they exit the College (Strategic Plan 2009-2012). The ADSA in ShCT is responsible for following up on the progress of graduates. Two departments under the ADSA, namely On-the-Job Training Department (OJTD) and Counseling and Graduates Follow-up Department (CGFD), have responsibilities related to graduates and their employment (Portfolio, p.39). The OJTD maintains a database of job opportunities, while the CGFD collects data on job opportunities and directs graduates towards them, follows up on the graduates and keeps records of their job placements (Portfolio, p.39).

The Panel learnt that ShCT has been regularly conducting job fairs as an annual activity (Portfolio, p.39) and invites experts from industry to conduct workshops related to personal development; this was confirmed during interviews with staff, students, a guest lecturer and employers. The Panel received positive comments from external stakeholders during interviews about ShCT, particularly about the students' preparation for employment and jobs compared with other CoTs. However, data available on graduates' employability indicated that only 11% of the 606 graduates found employment (Portfolio, p.40). The College intends to develop a mechanism for marketing its graduates. The Panel is of the view that the College needs to strengthen its career guidance to increase graduates' employability and revisit its mechanism for tracking graduates.

Recommendation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology take further steps to monitor the employability rates of its graduates and update the College's graduate tracking mechanisms.

3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

At the time of the quality audit, ShCT did not offer research programs so this section is not addressed in this Report.

4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

As the College offers education up to Advanced Diploma level, until now it has given priority to coursework (Portfolio, p.42). As noted in Section 1.1, however, the College's Vision includes *providing demonstratively high quality teaching, learning and research that make a significant contribution to on-going national economic development* (Portfolio, p.7). According to the College Bylaws, responsibility for research is vested in the College Council, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and HoDs. Faculty members are permitted to carry out their own research and publish their findings for the benefit of the College and the community. The ShCT survey carried out amongst staff indicated that staff members are keen to be involved in carrying out research (Portfolio, p.42). The College also plans to seek opportunities for research collaboration with industry and employers (Portfolio, p.47). The Panel supports the efforts of the College, in collaboration with the Ministry of Manpower, to align the research focus in the College's Vision and Mission statements (see Recommendation 1) and ShCT is encouraged to harness staff initiatives in this area.

5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ShCT is involved in developing relationships with local public and private sector organisations as well as developing relationships with the local community. The College intends to develop and sustain relationships with public and private organisations by establishing industry-college relationships, and mutually beneficial programs and activities (Portfolio p.42). This Chapter focuses on industry and community engagement planning and management, relationships with industry and employers, the professions, other education providers, alumni, and with the community at large.

5.1 *Industry and Community Engagement Planning and Management*

Industry and community engagement planning and management at ShCT fall under the responsibility of the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs (ADSA). Goal 5 “Relationship with the Public” of the Strategic Plan 2009-2012 states: “*We will foster an open and fruitful relationship with public and private sector organizations and with the community at large*” (Strategic Plan, p.4). The College states that this goal is then translated into the department Operational Plans (Portfolio, p.43). The College intends to measure progress through indicators, measures and targets. However, the Panel noted that the departmental Annual Report of 2010-2011 did not refer to progress with regard to these indicators and targets.

As in some other areas of the College’s activities, there has been a lack of institutional level planning for industry and community engagement. To some extent, this has been addressed in the Strategic Plan sub-goals. The College has identified the need to give priority to industry and community engagement activities and ensure a more coordinated approach. ShCT intends to come up with a specific action plan for overall industry and community engagement activities (Portfolio, p.45) but at the time of the audit this had not been developed.

The Panel considers, however, that ShCT and, specifically, the different units in the College with responsibilities for industry and community engagement, would benefit from using the Strategic Plan to derive an overarching plan for this key area. This will allow for specific monitoring of the College’s performance in relation to industry and community engagement and support identification of opportunities for improvement.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology develop and implement a College-level plan for the area of industry and community engagement and monitor progress in line with proposed indicators and targets.

5.2 *Relationships with Industry and Employers*

ShCT aims to invite companies for job fairs and experts from industry to give guest lectures (Portfolio, p.45). The Panel was made aware that the College invited 21 companies from Sohar Industrial Area to showcase activities and areas of mutual interest. The College has also recently signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with companies agreeing to carry out activities in order to share expertise between the College and these companies. Meetings with alumni and with employers during the visit provided additional support to the Panel’s view that the College is developing strong working relationships with local public and private sector organisations. Local companies have visited the campus to talk to business and engineering students and also participate in recruitment activities.

During the interviews with local business, the Panel noted that members of the business community also participate in providing guest lectures, workshops and training. It also found that staff from the College provided short courses for staff from industry. The Panel also learnt from external stakeholders that before introducing new programs, the College gets feedback from the community. The On the Job Training Department (OJTD) has developed strong relationships with local industry and business through on-the-job training. Students, both current and graduates, spoke very positively about this especially because it was practical in its orientation. The Panel is of the view that relationships with employers are positive and that ShCT has developed appropriate strategies and initiatives to engage industry and employers that will lead to the enhancement of the student experience as well as the College profile.

Commendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the initiatives undertaken by Shinas College of Technology to establish links and develop partnerships with local business and industry in order to enhance the student learning experience.

5.3 Relationships with the Professions

ShCT states that it promotes strong relationships with professional bodies as these will help students and staff to keep abreast of current trends and issues in their area of professional practice (Portfolio, p.48). ShCT has a relationship with the Oman Society of Engineers and students have been given free membership of the Society. Members of the Panel saw this as a positive initiative and were of the view that engagement with other professional societies, especially in the Business and IT disciplines, should be investigated. Given that Accounting and HR are major programs of the Business Department, the Panel is of the view that the establishment of relationships with professional bodies would benefit both staff and students.

5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers

ShCT is part of a network of six other CoTs. At present, ShCT shares its curriculum policies and practices, quality assurance and other matters through the Technical Committee, Specialization Committees and Quality Assurance Department (QAD) (Portfolio, p.48). The College indicates that it provides international certification programs for service providers (Portfolio, p.49). However, this was not mentioned or probed during the interviews with members of the business community.

Sharing best practice and benchmarking has been identified as possible future areas whereby ShCT can develop relationships with other institutions (Portfolio, p.49) and the College has recently established a Benchmarking Committee. The Panel was informed that the College also signed a MoU with Al Musanna College of Technology to benchmark common activities such as results of KPIs, teaching and learning, student progression and retention and staff retention. The Panel was of the view that relationships with other institutions would have twofold benefits to the College – first through embedding a culture of quality enhancement and improvement and second, seizing opportunities to learn from other institutions in terms of curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment practices. The Panel encourages the College to invest into developing formal relationships with local and international CoTs to engage in benchmarking activities and sharing of best practices. The Panel was encouraged by the track record the College has built up of working well with its partners and establishing long-term and productive relationships and supports its current initiatives in this area.

5.5 Relationships with Alumni

The College states that it is committed to maintaining close relationships with its graduates and considers its graduates to be a source of information and support. ShCT states that it strives to

maintain contact with its alumni and has developed a database on graduates, collecting data on opportunities and informing graduates about them (Portfolio, p.49). Graduates reported that the College did send them SMS messages and contact them about job opportunities. Alumni are informed of internal and external events like career and job fairs to encourage them to take advantage of employment opportunities provided by the participating organizations (Portfolio, p.49).

The Panel met groups of alumni, including both those working in business and engineering as well as those working in other areas. Both groups spoke positively about the education they had received from the College and were proud of the skills they had acquired during their training. For some, though, their preference was for more practical rather than theoretical learning. The Panel agrees that ShCT needs to develop a database of its graduates and recognises the need to provide improved communication to these graduates. It will be important for the College to give careful consideration to its development of the terms of reference for its alumni association, to ensure that these support the College's overall intentions in this area. Appropriate evaluation mechanisms (for what?) will also need to be developed.

Affirmation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to establish more formal channels of communication with its alumni and supports its efforts to develop more coordinated and systematic activities to engage with graduates.

5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large

The College acknowledges that the local community is one of its major stakeholders and that it has plans to engage with the community through outreach programs (Portfolio, p.50). The Panel was made aware of a variety of activities whereby staff and students engaged with the community. These included National Day celebration, Open Day and various cultural events. The Business Department has been involved in charity events by working with students with disabilities. Students have also been involved in a number of community activities. The Panel also noted the range of activities the College has engaged in with the community, including participating in the Clean Up campaign and the establishment of Business Week in 2011.

Parents and members of the community indicated that they had very positive views about the College and the quality of programs and the graduates and that ShCT cares for its students. Employers were of the view that students have good content knowledge and social skills. It is worth noting that some members of the community interviewed were of the view that there is a need to improve communications between the College and the community at large regarding activities occurring at the College. The Panel had a positive view regarding how the College develops and manages its relationships with the community.

6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Academic support services management and planning at ShCT are guided by Goal 7 in the Strategic Plan which aims at providing “excellent student services that support learning” (Portfolio, p.52). This Chapter reports on issues related to the planning and management of academic support services, registry, library services, teaching and learning services, information and learning technology, academic advising and teaching resources.

6.1 *Academic Support Services Planning and Management*

ShCT states that:

the responsibilities for providing academic support services including registry, library, academic advising and teaching resources are delegated to the different departments, centers and sections as indicated in the Bylaws, and the planning and management of these services is properly coordinated in order to achieve excellence in their delivery (Goal 7, Strategic Plan).

The overall planning and managing of academic support services is under the responsibility of the College Dean, assisted by the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA), the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA), the Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADAF), and the Head of the Educational Technology Center (ETC). They all, in turn, coordinate with different centers, departments, sections, units and personnel in the College (Portfolio, p.52). Neither a regular mechanism for collecting students’ feedback, nor a consistent approach to implementing the academic support services across centers and departments could be verified. The Panel urges ShCT to enhance its planning and management activities to deal with these issues.

Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology review the planning and management of its academic support services in order to ensure a consistent approach in this area which meets the needs of the College community.

6.2 *Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

The Admission and Registration Department (ARD) is responsible for providing registry Services (admission, registration, maintenance of student files, processing of transfers, postponement and dismissal, issuance of certificates and transcripts, and preparing statistics and data pertaining) to students and staff. ARD uses the three modules (the academic, registration, and foundation) provided in the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) registration system (Portfolio, p.53). The College acknowledges that all students and staff need to be trained in online registration (Portfolio, p.54). During interviews with students, it was apparent that not all students are familiar with the online registration process. However, the College has now included online registration training as part of its induction program for students, along with a handbook and a helpdesk.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to train students and staff in using all features of online registration, and supports its efforts to enhance the registration process.

6.3 *Library*

The ShCT Library is managed by a Head of Section assisted by two other staff. A Library Management System and a Label Printing Software are in place to enable various library services to be provided to staff and students. The Library contains around 4000 books (1300 titles) and a few journals (Portfolio, p.55). Purchasing new books needs the approval of the MoM (Portfolio, p.55). Although academic staff can access the Library via both internet and intranet, the students can use only the intranet apparently due to the limited accounts allocated to academic departments and the English Language Center (ELC).

According to the College, an internal audit of the Library has shown that on average only 15% of the student population makes use of the Library (Portfolio, p.55), but neither the limited space nor the low usage seems to have an effect on the reported average mean value shown in the results of the survey on student satisfaction of 3.3 (Portfolio, p.56). However, the Panel found that students and staff have complaints regarding the Library space, services, and resources and usage to meet standard students' learning needs. The Panel was informed that funds for a new building has been approved by the MoM that will accommodate expanded library provision. The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area.

Affirmation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to expand the Library space and align Library services and resources to the Strategic Plan to respond to the expected increase in student intake, and supports its efforts to seek funding for this from the Ministry of Manpower.

6.4 *Information and Learning Technology Services*

ShCT's Information and Learning Technology Services (ILTS) fall under the responsibility of the Head of the ETC, with support from the Educational Services Section (ESS) and the Computer Services Section (CSS). Although the Head of ETC reports directly to the College Dean, the provision of resources for ILTS is the responsibility of the ADAFA.

Although surveys carried out by the College indicate an overall satisfaction of staff and students regarding ILTS (Portfolio, p.57), the Panel also observed that the backup system is located inside the College building that could lead to losing data in case of fire. This is an area that ShCT is encouraged to address.

6.5 *Academic Advising*

The academic advising service of the College, as stated in the Portfolio (p.58), aims to provide effective academic advising through the implementation of the College policy. The Counseling and Graduate Follow-up Department (CGFD) supervises the appointment and training of academic advisors in coordination with the Heads of Section (HoSs)/Heads of Department (HoDs). The student is personally responsible for registering under the supervision of his/her assigned academic advisor. All ShCT teaching staff have responsibility for implementing this procedure, though not before a semester following the instructor's recruitment. The Foundation Program and academic program teaching staff provide consultation throughout their students' study period (one hour per week for each study course).

Through interviews with staff, students and from documentation provided, the Panel found support for the claim that ShCT has a useful policy and procedures for academic advising, in particular during student registrations, with more attention given to students under probation to facilitate their studies (Portfolio, p.58). However, the Panel was informed that there was an advisor:advisee ratio of 1:32 in some departments which may hinder the effectiveness of

academic advising and limit it to registration purposes only. The Panel urges the College to review this ratio. The Panel also heard that the office assigned to each academic instructor is only big enough to accommodate the instructor, and the room is crowded with no privacy and no place for the student to privately see his/her instructor (see Section 2.5). While the College states that it is aware of the implications for staff workload and physical resources (Portfolio, p.62), no action has yet been taken to address the issue raised. The Panel urges the College to review its provision in this area.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology review its current provision of academic advising to ensure that staff have adequate time and support to carry out this duty and that the relationship between academic advising on student progression and retention rates is monitored.

6.6 Student Learning Support

ShCT believes that providing students with opportunities for extracurricular activities promotes interaction between the students, the academic staff, and industry experts, thereby improving the student learning experience and optimizing student learning (Portfolio, p.60). Several departments are responsible for such activities; among them, in addition to the academic staff, are the ELC, the Housing, Student Activities and Graduation Department and On-the-Job-Training Department.

The Panel noted that extracurricular activities were held in various form such as seminars, workshops and company visits. However, students who were interviewed by the Panel complained about the insufficient number of such activities (see Section 7.10). While acknowledging the importance of extracurricular activities in improving the student learning experience, the Panel is of the view that more needs to be done in order to provide learning support in various disciplines. This is especially the case in terms of identifying the needs of underperforming students and providing sufficient learning and coaching opportunities.

6.7 Teaching Resources

According to the College, it aims to support the delivery of high quality teaching through ensuring that the latest technology is employed in teaching, learning and training (Portfolio, p.61). However, the Panel learnt that identifying and purchasing teaching equipment goes through a long process starting from requests from HoSs/HoDs/HoCs to ADAA to ADAFA to College Council and the final approval from the MoM is not assured as it depends on the operational budget allocated for ShCT.

The data provided in the Portfolio and the site visit interviews lead the Panel to conclude that while the existing facilities, together with the number of support staff, are adequate for the present student population, this may not be the case for the student population anticipated in years to come. As noted in Section 2.3, an increase in the size of intake for the academic year 2012/2013 has been planned; however, ShCT does not know the exact number of students yet and this has implications for planning for teaching resource provision. The Panel urges the College to take measures to meet the future needs.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, ensure that plans for any increase in student enrollment are aligned with current and future teaching resource provision.

7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

ShCT states that it seeks to achieve the holistic development of the students by providing a range of student services through the Student Affairs Department (SADs) (Portfolio, p.66). This Chapter reports on the Panel's findings in relation to students and student support services at ShCT which include: students and student support services planning and management; student profile; student satisfaction and climate; student behavior; career and employment services; student finances; accommodation, catering and transport; medical and counseling facilities; and social and recreational services and facilities.

7.1 *Students and Student Support Services Planning and Management*

Student support services planning and management are the responsibility of the Student Affairs Department (SAD), managed by the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA), with the support of ADAA and ADAFA. The SAD is made up of four Departments/Centers including Admission and Registration Department (ARD); On-the-Job-Training Department (OJTD); Counseling and Graduate Follow up Department (CGFD); Housing, and Student Activities and Graduation Department (HSAGD) (Portfolio, p.63). ARD is expected to maintain students' files and provide the necessary statistics to different departments (Portfolio, p.64). Each department submits an annual report to ADSA which includes accomplishments and difficulties faced, and makes recommendations for improvement. SAD conducts student meetings at all levels to discuss services and obtain feedback. Thus, the monitoring and review of the student support services are carried out internally. The Panel encourages ShCT to make use of other methods in parallel with student surveys, such as external feedback and benchmarking with other institutions, in order to assess the effectiveness of student support services provided by the College.

7.2 *Student Profile*

The total number of students enrolled in ShCT in the academic year 2008-2009 was 1867 students; this number went up to 2116 students in the academic year 2009-2010 (13% increase), increased by another 8% in the academic year 2010-2011 (2290 students) and by 38% in the academic year 2011-2012 (3155 students). However, the percentage of female students joining the College remained almost constant (about 34%) (Portfolio, p.65). The MoM determines the number of students to be admitted annually in the parallel programs as well as the entry requirements. ShCT's ADSA sets up the registration plan and procedures for each semester.

That Panel noted that there is a need to address the impact of student growth in terms of provision of Library,(see Section 6.3) and information and learning technology services. According to the student enrollment statistics in the year 2011, the Engineering Department is the largest of the academic departments (942 students), followed by the Information Technology Department (47 students) and finally the Business Studies Department (460 students). Over 40% of ShCT's students are currently enrolled in the General Foundation Program (GFP). The College presented detailed student profile data in the Portfolio and stated that it plans to carry out an analysis of the profile of students in collaboration with the MoM for the purpose of aligning student profile with the provision of services to students (Portfolio, p.65). The Panel acknowledges ShCT's intention to make effective use of student profile data as soon as possible.

7.3 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

ShCT solicits student feedback through temporarily created committees that follow up with the services provided for the students through meetings and surveys. Although a Student Council of

nine members was created recently (Portfolio, p.66), its formulation and roles have not yet been clearly identified. The College's SAD is responsible for identifying areas for improvement. The Panel encourages the ShCT to explore ways to help it to understand the needs of its students. Frequent meetings with students, and students' involvement in department/committee meeting might be useful.

Feedback from student interviews with the Panel suggests that the SAD is making considerable progress towards the achievement of high levels of student satisfaction. Most interviewed students highlighted that opportunities to discuss their complaints were available at ShCT, primarily through direct and personal contact with a person in a relevant position of authority. However, feedback from the College to students on actions taken in response to student complaints was a major issue voiced to the Panel by ShCT students. The Panel acknowledges ShCT's intention to disseminate the information regarding its services to all students through the College website and other channels. The Panel was informed that MoM will support ShCT to expand the existing space, and improve facilities, but the Panel encourages ShCT to take the opportunity to develop tangible action plans that are clearly communicated to all stakeholders (see Section 6.7). The College has carried out a number of surveys to monitor student satisfaction but there were a number of examples provided where feedback from students was not acted upon (Sections 1.11, 7.7, 7.8). The College is urged to use feedback to inform its planning and decision-making activities in all areas and ensure that students are informed of changes made in response to their feedback.

Recommendation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology ensure that feedback from review activities such as student surveys is used for planning and decision-making purposes and that students are informed of actions taken in response to their feedback.

7.4 Student Behavior

Student behavior is governed by ShCT's Bylaws (Bylaw Arts 73-91). Induction programs, in this regard, are conducted by the Counseling and Graduate Follow-up Department at the start of every semester for new intakes. Each student is provided with a student handbook, made available by MoM, as well as a leaflet from the College containing general instructions to students. However, the College noted that lack of qualified staff in guidance and counseling is an obstacle to hold individual meetings with students (Portfolio, p.67). The Panel noted that reported cases of student cheating, and misconduct have been dealt with through committees according to standard procedures (see Section 2.9).

7.5 Career and Employment Services

The College states that it "*aims at providing skills and opportunities to its students and graduates to find suitable jobs*" (Portfolio p.68). The CGFD is responsible for providing career and employment services through coordinating with OJTD. For this purpose, the College has the intention "*to establish career guidance facility for the graduates and students*" (Strategic Plan, Sub Goal 6.2).

ShCT states that it applies a three-pronged approach regarding career and employment: a compulsory course "Job Search Techniques"; how to write a professional CV; and how to deal with an interview (Portfolio, p.68). ShCT has taken part in Career Fairs, workshops and lectures by invited speakers from industry. Annual Career Awareness Programs have been administered since 2008 to the graduates by Shell Development Oman Company in cooperation with Prosper Management Consultancy. The MoM also maintains a job bank that catalogues employment vacancies and is accessible to students. While the Panel supports such initiatives,

ShCT is encouraged to take a more proactive approach to tracking graduates and reinforcing links with them by additional means (see Section 2.11).

7.6 *Student Finances*

Students do not pay fees as ShCT is a government-funded College. A monthly allowance is provided to eligible students by the MoM to cover transportation and housing expenses according to their situation. Though ShCT has limited control over its students' financial allocations as they are funded directly by the government, the College helps the students to receive their allowance by the end of each month (Portfolio, p.70).

Student feedback on finance showed that some students were dissatisfied with the amount of allowance received. Students also reported occasional delays in receiving this allowance especially for recent intake students.

7.7 *Accommodation, Catering and Transport*

ShCT does not provide student accommodation but assists female students in finding suitable accommodation in nearby areas (Portfolio, p.71). Meals services are provided through two separate cafeterias, but feedback from student interviews showed that students are not happy with the quality of food or the prices. The Panel confirmed that the College is aware of these complaints but no actions toward solving them were noted.

Transportation is provided by ShCT only for industrial visits, book fairs, sports activities, tours and medical emergencies. ShCT acts as liaison between female students and the companies that provide transport to and from the College. The Panel encourages ShCT to be more proactive in monitoring and, where justified, intervening to ensure that students' needs are being met (see Section 7.3).

7.8 *Medical and Counseling Facilities*

ShCT has an in-house clinic staffed by two female nurses. The clinic provides, during working hours, basic health services for students and staff (Portfolio, p.72). Medical emergencies are sent to the nearby governmental hospital using ShCT transportation. The Panel noted that student surveys were used by ShCT to monitor the effectiveness of its medical and counseling facilities. However, interview data with students and staff indicated that there are complaints about the clinic location, staff medical service and insufficient medical and counseling staff. The lack of qualified staff in this area has been noted above (see Section 7.4). The Panel considered evidence to show that the College had requested a doctor through the MoM and is awaiting a response.

Affirmation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Shinas College of Technology needs to improve the provision of medical services to staff and students and supports its efforts to do so.

7.9 *International Student Services*

This section does not apply to ShCT as it does not enroll international students.

7.10 *Social and Recreational Services and Facilities*

The College states that the HSAGD encourages students to join active clubs/societies and participate in various cultural, social and recreational activities. Students are given the freedom to express their talents and channel their energy through useful activities. Results from the

College's student satisfaction survey, however, showed that students complained about insufficient extracurricular activities (Portfolio, p.73).

ShCT recognizes the need for continued improvement in the area of sports facilities and extracurricular activities (Portfolio, p.73). The Panel is aware that most of the improvement plans are still waiting for MoM approval, especially recruiting specialized supervisors, and suggests that students be involved in the planning and arrangements for these new facilities. The Panel understands the existing lack of MoM funding for student activities, and encourages the College to address this issue to the Ministry. Moreover, during the interviews with students, it became clear to the Panel that recreational facilities were lacking for female students in particular.

Affirmation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority affirms that Shinas College of Technology needs to enhance its social and recreational services for students and encourages the College, in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower, to provide such services to male and female students alike.

8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan 2009-2012 states that the College “*will develop staff, offering opportunities for professional and personal growth and development, rewarding hard work and fostering leadership skills and innovation*” (Portfolio, p.74). This Chapter considers the key aspects of staff and staff support services including recruitment, induction, professional development, performance planning and review, severance and staff organizational climate.

8.1 *Human Resources Planning and Management*

The College Dean and the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA) are responsible for human resources (HR) planning and management as per the Bylaws (Articles. 9, 23). ShCT states that it employs a continuous review and revision process as a part of its ongoing plan to improve its services. The HR Department (HRD) has a departmental committee to support review and revision. The HRD is involving staff for the planning and implementation of activities. While the College’s Vision states that ShCT aims to provide “*demonstrably high quality teaching, learning and research*”, there was no evidence to show an aligned approach to HR planning and recruitment to meet its overall strategic objectives. The Panel was informed that the College views the lack of autonomy in relation to selection and recruitment as a challenge to meeting its strategic objectives. The overall approach to HR planning needs to be reviewed in consultation with the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) (see Recommendation 3).

8.2 *Staff Profile*

According to the Bylaws (Article. 27(c)), the HRD is responsible for maintaining and updating staff profiles. Minimum qualifications for all positions are set according to ministerial decisions. Statistical data presented by ShCT shows that the College staff is composed of 37% Omanis, 29% Indians, 13% Filipinos and a small percentage of other nationalities. Of the 318 staff members, 8% have a Doctorate degree, 57% have a Masters degree, and 17% have a Bachelors degree. Staff members in administration departments have Bachelors or Diploma degrees holders.

8.3 *Recruitment and Selection*

ShCT states that it recruits qualified teaching staff and technicians to its academic Departments and Centers to offer all students high quality teaching, learning, and training opportunities in line with the requirements of market needs (Portfolio, p.76). In interviews with senior management at the MoM and College level, the Panel was informed that professional standards for qualifications are adhered to during the hiring process of all staff. The MoM has laid down the policies, procedures and selection criteria for all staff. The role of the College is to identify academic staff shortages and report these in writing to the MoM. Recruitment for academic staff is conducted directly by the MoM and five recruiting companies. ShCT HRD is only actively engaged in the review of CVs and interviews in instances of mid-year hires. Through interviews conducted with the MoM and the College management, the Panel found that the locus of control for recruitment and selection in the MoM limits the College’s strategic approach to hiring qualified teaching staff to meet identified goals (see Recommendation 3).

8.4 *Induction*

A formal induction of all staff is conducted by the HRD, followed by an induction at the department level (Portfolio, p.78). According to the College, a survey of effectiveness was conducted for the last two consecutive academic years and the results indicate a high level of satisfaction, especially now that ShCT is involving staff in planning induction activities

(Portfolio, p.78). Interviews conducted by the Panel with various ShCT constituents highlighted the centralized and generic nature of MoM guidance for new staff. It was noted by the Panel that according to staff, ShCT ensures that general information provided by the MoM is contextualised to ensure that it is applicable to staff working in the College. The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area.

Affirmation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to improve its College level induction, and supports its efforts to provide ongoing high quality induction experiences.

8.5 Professional Development

ShCT offers its staff continuous staff development opportunities through a practice of identifying professional needs known as Training Needs Analysis (TNA). The College presented data on professional development opportunities offered in previous academic cycles with a high staff satisfaction response (Portfolio, p.79). The College's staff development plan is drafted based on the TNA and the most recent TNA report document presented to the Panel was conducted in January 2012. The results of the January 2012 TNA indicate "5 Most Needed" training for academic staff with proposed implementation for the academic year 2011-12. The Panel was unable to verify the implementation of identified training.

During the academic year 2011-2012, six Promethean Training workshops, six e-brary Training workshops, six technology workshops and two academic training workshops were conducted. The Panel was able to determine through interviews and supporting materials that professional development opportunities are offered internally. External support, time release and/or financial support, is also offered. The Panel supports these efforts.

Affirmation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Shinas College of Technology that it needs to continue offering targeted professional development opportunities for academic and administrative staff, and supports its efforts to plan and execute these.

8.6 Performance Planning and Review

ShCT engages in performance planning evaluation and review with formal policies, procedures and guidelines for implementation. The College states that Heads of Department (HoD) appraise the academic staff, technicians in labs and workshops are appraised by relevant HoDs and HOSs, and administrative staff members are appraised by the ADAFA and ADSA (Portfolio, p.80). Omani staff members in academic departments are also appraised according to Civil Service procedures. Staff are informed of the appraisal system during induction and the appraisals are conducted on a systematic basis according to the HRD schedule. The Panel was informed that according to Civil Service guidelines, staff are not informed of the content or outcome of their annual appraisal review and there was no evidence to show that professional development opportunities are aligned to performance planning. This is an area that the College is urged to review.

Recommendation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology review the current approach to performance appraisal to ensure that the feedback loop is closed and that the appraisal

is linked to professional development needs of academic and administrative staff.

The need to develop a transparent and consistent approach to the appraisal of senior staff has been raised in Section 1.3 above (see Recommendation 5).

8.7 *Promotion and Other Incentives*

ShCT motivates its staff through rewards and has generated a policy for promotion and incentives. As per the policy, two employees' names are forwarded to the MoM for final promotion selection. The Employee of the Month is alternated between administrative and academic staff and awarded with a certificate and a monetary gift of one month salary (Portfolio, p.81). With the recent increase in staff in response to the growing student intake and with its intention to reward hard work (Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan), ShCT has determined a need to expand its incentive activities to honor more than two employees per month. This has resulted in the ongoing development of activities for rewarding good work such as internal awards and recognition for "Best Committee" and 5 years of service. Staff interviews conducted by the Panel show that the staff are aware of and appreciative of the increased acknowledgement of their hard work.

Commendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Shinas College of Technology for the introduction of a suite of schemes to recognize and reward outstanding performance of academic and administrative staff.

8.8 *Severance*

ShCT follows a policy for severance either during the probationary period or beyond (Portfolio, p.82). The Staff Handbook indicates reference to a policy for severance Appendix 6 in the Quality Assurance Manual (QAM). The Heads of Centers and Departments strictly adhere to the policy and procedures for the severance of staff. The College Dean takes the final decision of severance (Bylaws Arts. 9-12).

8.9 *Staff Organisational Climate and Retention*

ShCT acknowledges that the institutional climate is key to improving staff retention rates (Portfolio, p.82). The College Council has responsibility for providing a healthy organizational climate at ShCT (Bylaws Arts. 16-10) while the Dean and the ADAFA take responsibility for providing facilities for staff with a focus on retention. The high level of staff satisfaction indicated by the College in the Portfolio (p.83) was confirmed by the Panel during the Audit Visit. However, the Panel was informed that there had been issues with staff retention and the College intends to review the reasons behind this. ShCT has recently developed a retention policy in light of this.

The College has identified the need to develop procedures and guidelines to handle staff grievances and has recently developed a staff grievance policy. The College now needs to implement this, ensure that it is clearly communicated to all staff and review its effectiveness. The Panel urges the College to make progress in this area.

Recommendation 15

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology implement mechanisms to monitor and respond to staff grievances which are clearly communicated to all staff

8.10 *Omanisation*

ShCT implements the Omanisation policy of the MoM. Statistical data on Omani staff is collected and disseminated to the MoM by the HRD (Portfolio, p.83). During the academic year 2011-12, ShCT had an increase of 29 new Omani staff. ShCT is currently considering the development of an internal policy of Omanisation after consultation with the MoM. The Panel supports this initiative.

9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

In support of the ShCT Vision as the “College of Choice”, ShCT aims to provide excellent support services and facilities to its community (Portfolio p.7). The Strategic Plan indicates its intention to ensure all facilities are “*managed well, effectively used, and developed innovatively*” (Goal 8). This Chapter considers aspects of general support services and facilities including planning and management; public relations and marketing communication services; and facilities management.

9.1 *General Support Services and Facilities Planning & Management*

The Strategic Plan targets the need for a comprehensive management system for ShCT facilities. The Dean is the overall custodian of the College resources and facilities, supported by a comprehensive administrative staff. The College states that it engages in ongoing self-assessment through surveys/questionnaires. Table 9.1 of the ShCT Portfolio (p.86) indicates overall staff satisfaction with facilities and general support services. Nevertheless, students expressed a general dissatisfaction with the areas of cafeteria, recreational areas, book store, theatre and multipurpose halls, and parking spaces and identified these as areas to improve (Portfolio, p.87). The Panel urges ShCT to design and implement a strategic approach to facilities management and development to meet needs of students, such as through the creation of a General Support Services and Facilities Committee with a prominent student presence.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology develop and implement a strategic approach to overseeing its facilities to ensure effective management, monitoring and upgrade where necessary.

9.2 *Public Relations and Marketing*

The Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADAFSA) has the primary responsibility for public relations and marketing. ShCT states that it recognizes and values the importance of public relations and marketing to support its status, reputation and image-building. ShCT, as one of the CoTs governed by the MoM, has benefited from the public relations and marketing activities of the MoM (Portfolio, p.87).

The Panel was informed that ShCT’s efforts to build public relations and to centrally market its services and opportunities have resulted in the development of mutually beneficial activities of the College and community. Nevertheless, ShCT recognizes the need for a separate unit to provide materials that are adequate, accurate, and timely (Portfolio p. 88) but this has yet to be established. Interviews conducted with alumni and external stakeholders highlighted the need for development in the areas of marketing ShCT as a “College of Choice”. Increased Memoranda of Understanding and advanced relations between market expectations and ShCT offerings may be one approach to improving its visibility and supporting the employability of its graduates. While the Panel recognises the efforts that the College has made to liaise with the community and employers (Portfolio, p.88), ShCT is urged to increase its efforts in this area in a planned and systematic manner.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Shinas College of Technology develop a comprehensive approach to marketing

and implement its plans to establish a marketing and media relation unit in order to raise the profile of the College and its graduates.

9.3 *Communication Services*

ShCT states that it aims to maintain a transparent and timely level of communication with staff, students, and other stakeholders. ShCT's survey results indicate that it has effective communication with staff and students (Portfolio, p.90). This claim was supported by the staff members who reported during the interviews the various methods used to communicate across the College such as electronic communication via emails, the College website and mobile text messages, internal memos, and announcements on notice boards. The Panel is of the view that the College's system of internal communication is effective.

It was noted through an internal survey conducted by the College and interviews conducted by the Panel that staff feel comfortable expressing their ideas and believe they are well received. The major medium for communication is the College website although a variety of media for communication are utilized (i.e. SMS, College website, internal emails, etc.). However, the Panel found through interviews with students and stakeholders that ShCT needs to improve its communication with alumni and other external stakeholders (see Chapter 5).

9.4 *Facilities Management*

The Health and Safety Committee, the ADAFA and the Administration Affairs Department share the responsibility for the effective management of facilities in compliance with the health and safety standards of Oman (ShCT Sub-goal 8.2). ShCT conducted a survey to measure availability of facilities and overall effectiveness (Portfolio, p.92). The results indicate ShCT has adequately responded to the needs of staff for general office equipment, supplies, and well-maintained offices. At the same time, the results indicate a need for improved security and privacy, as well as updated conditions in classrooms, labs, workshops, Library and e-learning resources. The Panel learnt that the College has plans for the inclusion of recreational facilities for staff and students in the new building (see Section 7.10).

APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

Prof Judyth Sachs (Chair)
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Provost
Macquarie University
Australia

Dr Huda Abu Hamdeh
Dean
Ibra Nursing Institute
Oman

Dr Mohanad Al Obaidi
Deputy Dean for Computing Awards
Gulf College
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Prof Mohammed Al Subu
Former Head
Accreditation & Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC)
Palestine

Dr Susan Marie Rumann
Director
The Language Development Center, Ciudad del Carmen
Campeche
Mexico

Dr. Rima Al-Zadjali (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.

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ADAA..... | Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs |
| ADAF..... | Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs |
| ADRI..... | A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising: Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement. |
| ADSA | Assistant Dean for Student Affairs |
| 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. |
| ARD | Admission and Registration Department |
| BoT | Board of Trustees |
| CC | College Council |
| CGFD..... | Counseling and Graduate Follow up Department |
| CoTs..... | Colleges of Technology |
| CRO | College Risk Officer |
| degree audit..... | internal review of programs carried out by the Ministry of Manpower |
| 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. |
| DGTE..... | Director General for Technological Education |
| ELC..... | English Language Centre |
| ETC..... | Educational Technology Centre |
| 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. |
| GAs | Graduate Attributes |
| GFP | General Foundation Program |
| HEI..... | Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider) |
| HoC..... | Head of Center |
| HoD..... | Head of Department |
| HoSs..... | Heads of Sections |
| HR..... | Human Resources |
| HRD | Human Resources Department |
| HSAGD..... | Housing, Student Activities and Graduation Department |
| ILTS | Information and Learning Technology Services |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 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 |
| MoF | Ministry of Finance |
| MoM..... | Ministry of Manpower |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| OAAA Board..... | The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority |
| OAAA | Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oaaa.gov.om) |
| OAC | Oman Accreditation Council (became OAAA in 2010) |
| OJT..... | On-the-Job-Training |
| OJTD..... | On-the-Job-Training Department |
| Panel Chairperson | The Chairperson of the Audit Panel. |
| PMS..... | Policy Management System |
| PMT | Policy Management Team |
| 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. |
| QAD | Quality Assurance Department |
| QAM | Quality Assurance Manual |
| QAU | Quality Assurance Unit |
| 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 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</i> , <i>deployment</i> and <i>results</i> . |
| 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> . |
| SAD..... | Student Affairs Department |
| ShCT | Shinas College of Technology |
| TNA | Training Needs Analysis |

