



Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Report of an Audit of Al Musanna College of Technology

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CONTENTS

Overview of the Quality Audit Process	3
How to Read This Report	4
Conclusions	5
Executive Summary of Findings	5
Summary of Commendations	7
Summary of Affirmations	7
Summary of Recommendations	8
1 Governance and Management	11
1.1 Mission, Vision and Values	11
1.2 Governance	12
1.3 Management.....	13
1.4 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance	14
1.5 Strategic Plan	14
1.6 Operational Planning.....	15
1.7 Financial Management	15
1.8 Risk Management	16
1.9 Policy Management.....	16
1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems.....	17
1.11 Student Grievance Process.....	18
1.12 Health and Safety	18
1.13 Oversight of Associated Entities (e.g. owned companies).....	18
2 Student Learning by Coursework Programs.....	19
2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives	19
2.2 Curriculum	20
2.3 Student Entry Standards	21
2.4 Foundation Program.....	21
2.5 Teaching Quality	21
2.6 Plagiarism	22
2.7 Student Placements	23
2.8 Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation.....	24
2.9 Academic Security and Invigilation.....	24
2.10 Student Retention and Progression	25
2.11 Graduate Destinations and Employability	26
3 Student Learning by Research Programs	27
4 Staff Research and Consultancy	28
5 Industry and Community Engagement.....	29
5.1 Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management	29
5.2 Relationships with Industry and Employers	29
5.3 Relationships with Professions	30
5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers	30
5.5 Relationships with Alumni.....	31
5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large.....	31

6 Academic Support Services	33
6.1 Academic Support Services Planning & Management	33
6.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records).....	34
6.3 Library.....	34
6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services	35
6.5 Academic Advising	35
6.6 Student Learning Support	36
6.7 Teaching Resources.....	36
7 Students and Student Support Services	37
7.1 Students and Student Support Services Planning & Management.....	37
7.2 Student Profile.....	37
7.3 Student Satisfaction and Climate	38
7.4 Student Behaviour.....	38
7.5 Career and Employment Services	38
7.6 Student Finances	39
7.7 Accommodation, Catering and Transport	39
7.8 Medical and Counselling Facilities.....	39
7.9 International Student Services.....	39
7.10 Social and Recreational Services and Facilities.....	39
8 Staff and Staff Support Services	41
8.1 Human Resources Planning & Management	41
8.2 Staff Profile	42
8.3 Recruitment and Selection	42
8.4 Induction	42
8.5 Professional Development	43
8.6 Performance Planning and Review	43
8.7 Promotion and Other Incentives	44
8.8 Severance	44
8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention.....	44
8.10 Omanisation	45
9 General Support Services and Facilities	46
9.1 General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management.....	46
9.2 Public Relations and Marketing.....	46
9.3 Communication Services	47
9.4 Facilities Management	47
Appendix A. Audit Panel	49
Appendix B. Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms	50

OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This Quality Audit Report (the 'Report') documents the findings of a Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) of AI Musanna College of Technology (ACT). It comments on ACT'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 ACT's activities and constructive feedback to ACT to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with ACT undertaking a self study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarized in its *Quality Audit Portfolio* (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the due date of 31 January 2010.

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 March 2010 to consider ACT's Portfolio. Following this, a Panel Member acting on behalf of the Audit Panel Chairperson and the Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to ACT on 21 April 2010 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 ACT's activities. One valid submission was received and considered.

The audit visit took place over 22 – 25 May. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 110 people, including governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. They also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

No documents created after 25 May (being the last day of the audit visit) were taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit.

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

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAAA Board on 28 November 2010.

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 providers (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. For further information, visit the OAAA website (<http://www.oac.gov.om>). Full details of the quality audit process are available in OAAA's *HEI Quality Audit Manual* (available from <http://www.oac.gov.om/qa/HEI/>).

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

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

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

The second stage in the institutional accreditation process is Standards Assessment. Unlike the Quality Audit, this stage, which will take place about four years after the Quality Audit, does provide a summative assessment against external standards in the 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.oac.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

AI Musanna College of Technology (ACT) was established in 1993. It is a public college serving both male and female students and it operates under the supervision of Oman's Directorate General of Technological Education, Ministry of Manpower (MoM). It is one of seven such public Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in the Sultanate of Oman. ACT offers programs in the fields of Engineering, Information Technology and Business Studies which lead to awards at Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma levels. The College has a student population of approximately 2070 of which around 40% are enrolled in the General Foundation Program.

ACT's institutional self-study, which led to the production of the Quality Audit Portfolio, was guided and facilitated by the Quality Assurance Department of the MoM, which plays a key role in supporting quality assurance and improvement in the CoTs network. Following College-wide awareness activities to introduce the self-study, working groups were formed to produce evaluative reports on the 2008-2009 academic year; these reports formed the basis of the Portfolio. The Panel found the Portfolio to be a clearly written and inclusive document following the principles of the ADRI approach (see Appendix B). The College attempted to conduct a candid evaluative study and to identify areas and strategies for genuine improvement. However, this effort was compromised by the heavy dependence of the study on survey data that in itself may lack validity as well as the lack of external benchmarks to inform in-depth analysis. Future institutional survey initiatives need to be strengthened in these areas.

ACT shares its Mission, Vision, values and eight strategic goals with the other CoTs but it is differentiated from the other colleges at the level of its strategic sub-goals, strategies and key performance indicators (KPIs). It is significant, however, that at present ACT's activities do not align with its Vision with respect to research although it has taken some preliminary steps towards developing this function within the College. The College needs to address this, both in terms of public accountability but also in terms of it developing its capacity and capability as a higher education institution that can fulfill its aspirations of offering Bachelor of Technology degree programs.

In terms of governance, the CoTs are governed by common Bylaws and operate within a clear organisational structure. Key CoT entities within this are: the Board of Trustees (BoT), the Undersecretary for Technological Education and Vocational Training, and the Technical Committee on which the CoT deans serve. The Quality Audit Panel formed the view that the CoTs are set to benefit from the recently increased level of activity of the BoT. Further, the potential contribution of the Technical Committee to organisational decision-making would be enhanced if it worked within explicit terms of reference. ACT has undertaken a preliminary evaluation of its governance function. Further review and more comprehensive evaluation is now required. This evaluation will inform ongoing monitoring of how well the College is supported by the existing arrangements in conducting its operations and working towards fulfilling its aspirations. In terms of management, the College has a well-functioning College Council which is effectively supported by a number of recently established committees. It has also established a comprehensive policy development process which is serving the College well. ACT embraced the opportunity it had to develop the College-specific elements in its 2009-2012 Strategic Plan. Greater financial autonomy would allow more explicit linking of the associated operational plans to resources.

ACT regards student learning by coursework as its core function. Given the centrality of this function to its Mission, it is important that ACT addresses the significant number of opportunities for improvement that exist within this area. It is to ACT's credit that a number of these were identified by the College during its self-study and that the new Strategic Plan provides direction for future action. A key challenge for ACT is its high student failure and drop-out rate in comparison to other CoTs. In addition ACT has a lack of recorded data and analysis concerning graduate destinations and employability. The College needs to develop specific and comprehensive systems to evaluate these critical areas in order to inform strategies to promote improvement. A broad area for improvement relates to the need for use of appropriate benchmarks to inform the evaluation of processes and results; consideration of this will support ACT in maximising the potential it has to provide input into and feedback on central directives from the MoM concerning, for example, graduate attributes, curriculum and student entry standards. In addition, and importantly, a system for benchmarking academic standards is required at ACT. The College has in place systems that inform improvements in teaching quality. Development of a mechanism to coordinate this at institutional level would maximise the benefits of these to ACT. Of particular credit to ACT is its well-established On-the-Job-Training (OJT) program; this is well-received by students and supported by enthusiastic staff and comprehensive procedures that allow for review and quality improvement.

ACT has developed commendable relationships with local industry through both its OJT program and other activities. It is now working on further developing its relationship with alumni. The College also engages with the community at large through a variety of activities but these need to be planned, coordinated and evaluated to ensure effective implementation.

Support for student learning at ACT has significant strength in terms of the development of information and learning technology services in line with its stated goals. The academic advising system, which is well-established, is supportive and responsive to feedback. However, the library does not currently meet the College's requirements and the planned improvements to address this fully are relatively long-term. The College, therefore, needs to develop strategies to ensure that existing students are provided with access to appropriate library resources.

ACT students benefit from a comprehensive induction process that is undergoing further improvement and appear well supported in terms of medical care and transportation. They have the opportunity to join student clubs and to engage in a variety of sporting and recreational activities; the College recognises that its social and recreational services and facilities for students are limited but it is taking steps to address this and is responsive to student feedback. Central funding for extra-curricular activities at the CoTs and, longer term, the development of a Student Service Center at ACT are both currently being considered at ministerial level. Approval of these would greatly support ACT in providing an enhanced overall learning experience for its students. The College now has a Career Guidance Office, which is impacting positively on ACT's challenge to support its students in finding appropriate employment following graduation. Whilst ACT is generally supportive of students and receptive to the 'student voice', it now needs to involve students in committees concerned with student affairs and in associated decision making processes.

ACT has set a suite of Strategic Plan sub-goals relating to human resource planning and management in recognition of the fundamental importance of these areas in the achievement of its Mission. The College is aware that one of its main current challenges is staff retention, particularly in the English Language Center. Staff selection and recruitment at ACT is a complex collaborative process involving the MoM, the College and, currently, five different recruitment agencies. Staff are recruited on different contracts with different terms and conditions. The inequity in relation to staff promotion and incentives that currently exists needs to be further evaluated to determine its impact on staff satisfaction and retention and to inform improvements. ACT operates an effective staff induction process but needs to build on its current professional development activities to ensure that academic staff maintain currency in their subject areas. The College also needs to develop a comprehensive system to evaluate staff satisfaction and to inform the development of strategies to improve retention. It has recently implemented a system of exit interviews which could be of use in this regard.

In recent years, ACT has successfully completed the first two stages of a major infrastructure development project. This has resulted in: an auditorium; a new building for Electronic and Electrical Engineering; a new building for Mechanical Engineering; and an English Language Center. The final stage of this project, comprising a new building for IT and Business Studies and a new administration building, as well as the conversion of the current IT and Business Studies building into a new library facility, is awaiting final ministerial approval. In line with the development of this physical infrastructure, ACT has also expanded its technological infrastructure. The College's interactive portal is one feature that is being used to enhance institutional effectiveness in a number of ways. These developments align with the College's Mission, Vision and Strategic Plan.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Musanna College of Technology for the establishment of a committee system which is beginning to play a significant role in the functioning of ACT. 14
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Musanna College of Technology for its expansion of technological infrastructure which provides increased capacity, resources and services that enhance institutional effectiveness. 14
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Musanna College of Technology for its inclusive Strategic Planning process as applied to the College-specific elements of its Strategic Plan. 14
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Musanna College of Technology for implementing a comprehensive policy development and communication process as part of its overall policy management system. 16
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al-Musanna College of Technology for its On-the-Job-Training program which impacts positively on the student learning experience. 24
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Musanna College of Technology for engaging constructively with local industry and employers through a variety of activities. 30

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Musanna College of Technology that the Board of Trustees has yet to fulfill its specified role optimally, and supports the more pro-active role that the Board of Trustees has started to play in governance. 12
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Musanna College of Technology that central funding for extra-curricular activities is required and supports its efforts towards securing this. 15

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that a comprehensive risk management system is required and supports the steps it has taken towards developing and implementing such a system.16
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the efforts of AI Musanna College of Technology to identify clear benchmarks against which progress towards goals in its Strategic Plan can be reliably measured.....18
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that its graduate attributes need to be clearly mapped to its curricula, formally assessed, and the results used to inform continuous improvement of programs and processes.....20
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the initiatives that AI Musanna College of Technology has taken towards developing an institutional level framework and supporting systems to coordinate its efforts towards ensuring good quality teaching.22
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that a plagiarism policy needs to be developed, disseminated and consistently implemented and supports the steps that the College has taken in this regard.23
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that a comprehensive evaluation of graduate destinations and employability is required and supports its plans to develop this aspect of its operations.....26
9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that it needs to establish formal relationships with other Higher Education providers, including institutions external to the Colleges of Technology, and to benchmark activities with these providers.....31
10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that there is a need for the College to build on its work to produce an alumni charter supported by a relevant framework of management, activities and data.31
11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that its engagement with the local community needs to be better evaluated and for this to inform the planning and management of activities as this function develops.32
12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that there is a need for the College to enhance its social and recreational services and facilities, and in particular to ensure the provision of adequate funding in this area, and supports its efforts towards addressing these requirements.40
13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that its physical infrastructure needs further development and supports its achievements, endeavors and on-going developments in this area.46
14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that additional capacity should be provided on its main computer server to allow for effective Internet access and e-mail communication by students.....47

Summary of Recommendations

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

1.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology review its position and intentions with respect to research and ensure that its activities in this area and its Vision statement align.	12
2.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement comprehensive systems to evaluate and report on the impact of the existing governance bodies in supporting the College's operations and aspirations.	13
3.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology seek greater autonomy for its budgeting to ensure appropriate links between planning and resource allocation.....	16
4.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop mechanisms to ensure that evaluation of entities and activities systematically informs change as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.	17
5.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop mechanisms to ensure that data collection via surveys yields valid results which can be used to inform ongoing initiatives and processes.	18
6.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop mechanisms to ensure external stakeholder input into graduate attribute review activities led by the Ministry of Manpower.	19
7.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology conduct a comprehensive and inclusive evaluation of its current program and curriculum review practices.	21
8.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop strategies to ensure that academic standards of attainment are appropriately benchmarked and externally verified.	24
9.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement systems that provide for comprehensive evaluation and analysis of student retention and progression data which informs strategies and mechanisms to address high student failure and drop out rates.	25
10.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop a conceptual framework for staff research that supports its strategic intent.	28
11.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement an institutional approach to encourage and guide staff and student interaction with professional bodies.	30
12.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology take steps to ensure that its library services are enhanced to levels consistent with the College's Mission and Vision.	35
13.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology take steps to involve students in committees concerned directly with student affairs and associated decision-making processes.	37
14.	The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology take steps to ensure that the needs of all its students, and in particular its female students, are adequately provided for in terms of social space and other non-academic student amenities.	40

15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation process to support effective selection and recruitment of staff.....42
16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop institutional level systems to ensure that the subject authority of its academic staff is maintained through the provision of appropriate professional development activities.43
17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology review the impact of the existing staff promotion and reward systems in operation at the College for their impact on staff performance and retention, and develop strategies to address identified areas of concern.44
18. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement a comprehensive staff satisfaction evaluation system that informs the development of strategies to improve staff retention.....45

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

AI Musanna College of Technology (ACT) is one of seven Colleges of Technology (CoTs) that operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) and is subject to the same regulations and Bylaws as the other institutions. This chapter reports on the Audit Panel's findings in relation to overall governance and management at ACT and specifically covers the following: Mission, Vision and values; governance; management; strategic plan; operational planning; financial management; risk management; policy management; entity and activity review systems; student grievance process; and health and safety.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

The Vision, Mission and values of ACT are the same as those of all other CoTs operating under the MoM. The Vision is:

ACT intends to become the “College of Choice” for students and for the industry by providing demonstrably high quality teaching, learning and research that makes a significant contribution to ongoing national development. (Portfolio, p.1)

The Vision translates into the following Mission statement:

The Mission of ACT is to achieve and sustain a strong reputation for excellence in teaching and learning. The College is dedicated to the delivery of high quality technical 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. (ibid)

The values of the institution are: professionalism; integrity; accountability; flexibility; creativity; tolerance; teamwork; and communication (Portfolio, pp.1-2)

The Vision, Mission and values for the CoTs are centrally developed through the MoM. The Panel recognises that the CoTs participate in this process but had some concern that the Mission and Vision statements themselves may be too general in nature to provide the compass for ACT which is usually expected of such statements. The Panel encourages the Board of Trustees (BoT – see Section 1.2) and the College community to reflect on this. The Panel does recognise, however, that individual differentiation occurs at the level of strategic planning through the development of specific sub-goals by each of the individual colleges.

ACT acknowledges that research is not formally addressed at present as the institution focuses on providing skills-oriented technological education (Portfolio, p.2). Moreover, ACT states that recommendations have been made in the Strategic Plan 2009-2012 to eliminate the area of research and consultancy from the CoTs model (Portfolio, p.44). With respect to research, there is clearly a misalignment between ACT's Vision and current and intended operations; this needs to be addressed. Some form of research is typically a core function of a higher education institution and, particularly as ACT has aspirations to offer Bachelor of Technology degrees (Portfolio, p.v), the Panel is of the view that ACT would be well-served to build on any initial steps that have been taken to encourage staff and student research. The Panel learned of some isolated examples of staff and students being supported by ACT to engage in research activities and the relevant section in the College's Quality Assurance Manual (Research and Consultancy) provides useful direction. The Panel suggests that the College considers the type of research that would be appropriate for ACT as a College of Technology (and considers that applied research in

a small number of identified niches areas could serve to differentiate ACT from other CoTs). Research is discussed further in Chapter 4 of this Report.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Musanna College of Technology review its position and intentions with respect to research and ensure that its activities in this area and its Vision statement align.

Given the centralised development of the Vision, Mission and values, the Panel suggests that the College engage in an institutional-wide debate (with appropriate input from external stakeholders) on how these statements relate to ACT and its aspirations. This could be beneficial in developing shared commitment and enthusiasm to make ACT a community of learning for both staff and students and in ensuring widespread understanding of the role that ACT can play in the community and in the continued development of a prosperous Oman. The Panel also noted the flexibility and scope that ACT has, together with other CoTs, to develop its own 'specialisations' within the broad fields of study (Engineering, Information Technology and Business Studies) that it offers.

1.2 Governance

The Panel noted the clear organisational structure within which ACT operates. In terms of governance, this includes: the BoT; the MoM Undersecretary for Technological Educational and Vocational Training; the Technical Committee; and the College Council. The CoTs Bylaws indicate that in addition to serving on the BoT (as Deputy Chair), the Undersecretary for Technological Education and Vocational Training also supervises the progress of all the CoTs and prepares future plans for the Minister of Manpower in line with government planning and labour market needs.

The BoT is chaired by the Minister of Manpower. Other members include: the Undersecretary for Technological Educational and Vocational Training, the Director General for Technological Education, two CoT deans and representatives of ministries, government agencies, and industry (Portfolio, p.3). The role of the BoT in setting the strategies and policies of the CoTs and following up on their implementation is detailed in the CoTs Bylaws. The Panel was disconcerted to find that, prior to the development of the Portfolio, the BoT had only met three times since 2006 (Portfolio, p.4) despite its remit (as articulated in the College Bylaws) to meet "*four times a year or as deemed necessary*". This is a concern for both the monitoring of the quality of provision and the monitoring of progress in meeting the institutional objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan, and the sub-goals that are specific to ACT. However, the Panel was encouraged to learn that this concern has been recognised and that the BoT is now meeting regularly.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Musanna College of Technology that the Board of Trustees has yet to fulfill its specified role optimally, and supports the more pro-active role that the Board of Trustees has started to play in governance.

The Panel noted that there is, as yet, no mechanism in place for the BoT to assess its effectiveness nor is there an induction process for new BoT members to assist them in understanding their role and responsibilities in order to function optimally. In considering the wider relationship between the BoT and the MoM, the Panel suggests that this be re-examined in terms of the delineation of respective roles (also see Recommendation 2).

The Technical Committee is chaired by the Director General of Technological Education and made up of the deans of all the CoTs. The committee makes recommendations to the Undersecretary for Technological Educational and Vocational Training. The Bylaws indicate that this committee's remit includes looking into academic program delivery (Article 57) and suggesting amendments to quality assurance systems "*in a way that enables the educational process in the colleges to keep pace with the technological changes and developments*" (Article 94). However, there are no comprehensive, explicit terms of reference for this committee. The Panel also found that the committee lacks clear understanding of its role and responsibilities as well as its place in the overall governance structure. The Panel suggests that this needs to be addressed in order to capitalise on the potential contribution of this committee to the overall governance of the CoTs.

The Panel noted that ACT conducted a staff evaluation of its governance in May 2009. The College reported that although the overall numerical result appeared satisfactory, there was still scope for improvement (Portfolio, p.4). The Panel supports this first step that the College has taken in evaluating its system of governance and management, but considers this needs to be developed into a more comprehensive system that will allow a detailed analysis of how the current governance systems impact on ACT.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement comprehensive systems to evaluate and report on the impact of the existing governance bodies in supporting the College's operations and aspirations.

1.3 Management

Responsibility for management of the College rests with the College Dean and the College Council (Bylaws, p.12). Support is provided by Center and Departmental Councils. Respective roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in the Bylaws. The Panel confirmed that the College Council, which is chaired by the Dean, meets regularly on a monthly basis and is guided by the responsibilities set out in the CoTs Bylaws. Within its role, the Council "*coordinates all ACT's activities in accordance with the Bylaws, ministerial decisions and regulations to ensure the attainment of goals*" (Portfolio, p.4). Membership of the Council includes the three Assistant Deans (Academic Affairs; Administration and Finance; and Student Affairs), Heads of College Centers and Departments and also three private sector representatives. However, the College acknowledges that the participation and contribution of College Council members representing the private sector has not been entirely satisfactory (Portfolio, p.4).

The Panel notes that ACT falls under the jurisdiction of the MoM and that this results in a top-down approach to some aspects of management. In view of this, the Panel was pleased to see that the College has established a number of committees to assist and advise the College Council with the management of the institution in given functional areas. These cover areas such as Policy Development, On-the-Job-Training (OJT) and Health and Safety. Each committee has a clearly articulated membership and well-communicated terms of reference. Although they are at an early stage of development, these committees appear to be functioning well. During interviews with members of these committees, the Panel was impressed by the general level of enthusiasm and understanding of respective tasks. The Panel noted various achievements of different committees (see Sections 1.9 and 1.12 for examples of the work of the Policy Development Committee and the Health and Safety Committee). The Panel formed the view that the system both supports staff in engaging with the development of the institution and contributes positively to the management of ACT.

Commendation 1

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

The Panel supports the College's intention "to rotate staff members in committees in order to ensure maximum involvement and exposure to management functions" (Portfolio, p.7) and also, where appropriate, to include student representatives on committees.

ACT has expanded its use of technology across the institution. It has acquired and deployed on-line resources that have already enhanced the collection, management and analysis of data particularly in relation to the provision of information and learning technology services themselves. ACT is now taking steps to provide all surveys and feedback on-line on the College portal and web-site to 'provide continuous assessment' (Portfolio, p.61 – also see Section 6.1). Whilst noting that, at present, data collection and analysis at ACT is heavily dependent on information collected from surveys only (see Section 1.10), the Panel formed the view that ACT's use of technology will increasingly support effective management decision-making.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends AI Musanna College of Technology for its expansion of technological infrastructure which provides increased capacity, resources and services that enhance institutional effectiveness.

1.4 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance

ACT is supported by the central Quality Assurance Department (QAD) of the MoM (see section 1.10 below). Other than this, ACT has no institutional affiliation for programs or quality assurance.

1.5 Strategic Plan

ACT's first Strategic Plan, covering the period from 2006-2008, was common for all CoTs. A comprehensive and inclusive review of the implementation of this plan led to the decision that for the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan, although the Mission, Vision, and values would remain common to all the CoTs together with eight strategic goals, each CoT would then develop its own sub-goals, strategies and key performance indicators (Portfolio, p.7). The planning documentation indicates that the rationale for this change included giving each college the desired flexibility to address their particular needs as well as to increase the involvement of college staff and create a sense of ownership. ACT conducted a series of workshops during which specific elements of the ACT 2009-2012 Strategic Plan were developed. The Plan includes strategies, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as well as timeframes and responsibilities for each of the sub-goals that have been developed. Evaluation of the workshops indicated that staff found the new planning process positive in a number of aspects and this was confirmed by the Panel during the audit visit. The Plan was deployed in May 2009 and ACT plans to conduct an annual review process to monitor implementation and achievement. The Panel concluded that the Strategic Planning process has been improved and is set to serve the College well.

Commendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends AI Musanna College of Technology for its inclusive Strategic Planning process as applied to the College-specific elements of its Strategic Plan.

1.6 *Operational Planning*

ACT indicates that Centers and Departments (C&Ds) now develop their own operational plans in line with the Strategic Plan by identifying the goals and sub-goals which fit into their department functions and extracting the relevant strategies and key performance indicators from the Plan (and adding further strategies and KPIs as needed) (Portfolio, p.9). However, the Panel found that whilst C&Ds do prepare activity plans which clearly function as working documents, at present, these do not appear to align well with the Strategic Plan. C&Ds produce annual reports in relation to their activity plans and the College has also sought feedback from staff through a survey on the operational planning process. The Panel supports these efforts and encourages the College to strengthen its C&D operational and activity planning processes to ensure that all plans are appropriately aligned. The Panel encourages the College to proceed with its stated intention to develop a mechanism to ensure that operational plans are regularly monitored and reviewed throughout the year (Portfolio, p.9). This should be done in relation to the extensive suite of KPIs that the College has developed.

1.7 *Financial Management*

The Panel confirmed that ACT's financial systems operate as set out in the Portfolio (pp.10-11). The College is funded by the MoM with the overall budget being proportional to the number of students enrolled. The recurring budget is allocated for staff salaries, student allowances and operational expenses. A portion of the operational budget (approximately 40%) is controlled by ACT. This is considered by senior staff in relation to annual requirements submitted by C&Ds and forwarded to the College Council for approval. The College Council discusses and approves C&D budget requirements twice a year. Financial transactions within the College are approved by the Dean. The Panel was informed that there is provision for additional operating funds to be requested by the Dean through the on-line system linked to the Ministry of Finance and, that as long as set procedures are followed, the request is granted. The financial system at the College is linked electronically to the Ministry of Finance and is subject to audit by the MoM. ACT has sought initial feedback from staff on how effective and constructive the College financial system is by including a statement relating to this in a survey on governance and management; this is in line with evaluating Sub-Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan, which is to maintain an effective financial system. Whilst the result of this survey was positive, more comprehensive evaluation is required.

In terms of capital expenditure, ACT has been successful in securing MoM funding for a three-phase plan to expand its infrastructure and facilities. (These facilities are further discussed in Section 9.1.)

To date there has been no specific budget allocation from the MoM for extra-curricular activities. Although ACT has been successful in securing funding from the private sector to allow for some activities in this area, the Panel had concerns over the risk associated with the omission of this item from the annual budget. The Panel was therefore very pleased to learn that this issue had been discussed recently by the BoT and that formal approval of an allocation for this area is being considered by the Ministry of Finance. The Panel strongly supports this proposal.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that central funding for extra-curricular activities is required and supports its efforts towards securing this.

The Panel noted that ACT has relatively limited control over its budget and has expressed a desire for greater financial autonomy and budgetary control. Given that the College now has greater flexibility in setting its Strategic Plan by developing its own sub-goals and associated strategies, the Panel is of the view that this change is required so that specific elements of the plan can be explicitly linked to the budget.

Recommendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Musanna College of Technology seek greater autonomy for its budgeting to ensure appropriate links between planning and resource allocation.

1.8 Risk Management

One of ACT's sub-goals is to “*review and implement an effective Risk Management System*”. The Panel confirmed that all C&Ds have developed a ‘Risk Management Matrix’, which includes identified risks, recommended solutions/preventative measures, resources required and persons responsible. They also maintain logbooks in which they report on unexpected events that have taken place and the remedial action taken. The College acknowledges that its existing practices to deal with risk need to be built upon and has plans to develop a comprehensive risk management system (Portfolio, p.13). The Panel confirmed that this initiative is underway and being led by the Dean. A risk management policy is currently being developed and in due course this will be forwarded to the MoM for approval.

Affirmation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Musanna College of Technology that a comprehensive risk management system is required and supports the steps it has taken towards developing and implementing such a system.

1.9 Policy Management

ACT is currently in the process of standardising the policies of the College through the development of a Policy Management System. This is part of a strategy identified in the Strategic Plan to support an enhanced management function. The Panel observed that the College has made considerable progress towards implementing this strategy. It has developed a comprehensive Policy Management System document that clearly sets out the overall framework and gives detailed guidance on the process for the development and approval of new policies. This process is consultative, multi-staged, and supportive of policies originating in C&Ds. In support of this process, and as a requirement of this new system, a Policy Development Committee has been established. This committee, which is headed by the Dean, undertakes the final review of policies before presenting them to the College Council for approval. A suite of policies (including policies for student assessment, library services, and health and safety) have recently been developed under the new system. The Panel also heard during interviews that a number of new policies are under development. These cover plagiarism, risk management and also an alumni charter and a code of ethics. The Panel confirmed that staff members are made aware of new policies through various means including the College intranet portal. The Panel was pleased to hear that specific training is being considered to support the implementation of some policies, such as the policy on plagiarism that is nearing the final stage of approval.

Commendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Musanna College of Technology for implementing a comprehensive policy development and communication process as part of its overall policy management system.

The Policy Management System document states that all approved policies must be reviewed every two years and the standard policy format identifies the review date. As this is a new initiative, the Panel understood that mechanisms to monitor, review and evaluate the

implementation of the policies have yet to be developed and implemented; the Panel supports the College's stated intention to address this.

1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems

ACT, like all the CoTs, falls under the auspices of the QAD of the MoM and the QAD oversees the institutions' quality assurance arrangements. The QAD audits ACT twice a year to ensure compliance with the Bylaws and ministerial decrees as well as ACT's own Quality Assurance Manual. The QAD offers advice and guidance and formally follows up on previous recommendations.

ACT has established a Quality Assurance Office (QAO) to help coordinate and facilitate QAD and ACT-directed quality assurance activities as well as support the work of the Quality Assurance Committee, whose role is clearly set out in the College's Quality Assurance Manual. The QAO has also conducted internal C&D audits; the College advises that this is to become an annual activity in which the QAO intends to involve more College staff (Portfolio, p.15). The Panel learned that ACT has an active College Council and active Departmental Councils, which contribute to monitoring and review activities. A key review mechanism within the College is the system of annual reporting by all C&Ds. Whilst this is a well established activity, the Panel agrees with ACT that it would benefit from review (Portfolio, p.15) to ensure that the previous year's recommendations are followed up and that the system supports a cycle of continuous improvement.

The Panel appreciates the manner in which, with the support of the QAD, ACT is developing its quality assurance function and the efforts ACT is making to develop a culture of quality across the institution. ACT has nevertheless identified the need to conduct awareness programs to "enable in-depth understanding by staff of the role of QAD, QAO, the self-study groups and other review bodies and systems" (Portfolio, p.15). The Panel supports this as a strategy to help ensure that quality assurance activities are embraced by staff and implemented optimally; during the audit visit the Panel formed the view that there may be an issue of incomplete staff acceptance of quality arrangements that have been put in place.

ACT has conducted a number of surveys as a means to measure its performance in core functions. These include feedback surveys from lecturers, employers and alumni. The Panel is appreciative of ACT's wish to collect feedback and its candour in reporting survey results; nevertheless, the Panel was not convinced that the analysis of results is sufficiently comprehensive or that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that this feedback leads in a systematic way to change which is subsequently monitored and evaluated.

Recommendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Musanna College of Technology develop mechanisms to ensure that evaluation of entities and activities systematically informs change as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.

Moreover, the Panel is concerned about the proliferation of surveys to measure the effectiveness of the student learning experience and suggests that these should be used in conjunction with other evaluation tools and reference points to provide valid data to assess and improve the quality of education provision at ACT. With regard to this, the Panel was pleased to note that ACT plans to "improve the institution's capacity for self-review and its systems of quality assurance by launching a system for benchmarking with other CTs" (Portfolio, p.15). The Panel viewed documentation relating to the establishment of a benchmarking partnership with Nizwa College of Technology that ACT is progressing. This is set to cover the areas of teaching and learning, academic performance, and teaching faculty.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the efforts of AI Musanna College of Technology to identify clear benchmarks against which progress towards goals in its Strategic Plan can be reliably measured.

The Panel expects the College to continue to use surveys as an important tool for collecting feedback. However, the Panel had serious reservations about the validity of some of the results reported in the Portfolio, particularly in terms of sampling. The College needs to develop mechanisms to support the collection of valid survey data that merits detailed analysis. The outcomes then need to be used to inform continuous improvement.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop mechanisms to ensure that data collection via surveys yields valid results which can be used to inform ongoing initiatives and processes.

1.11 Student Grievance Process

There is a student grievance procedure which is well known by students across the institution. The Panel heard during a range of interviews that this system is working well with grievances and appeals being dealt with in a timely manner.

1.12 Health and Safety

ACT has a Health and Safety policy developed in 2009 which is supported by previously existing comprehensive Quality Sub-Manuals detailing health and safety procedures in laboratories (including IT laboratories) and workshops. These manuals include safety inspection checklists and accident reporting and investigation forms. ACT established a Health and Safety Committee at the beginning of 2009 with representation from across the College. The Panel confirmed that this Committee meets on a monthly basis and is very active in its role (also see Commendation 1). C&Ds send detailed reports to the Committee identifying health and safety problems with recommended solutions for discussion and consideration. The Panel heard a number of examples of actions that have resulted from this. Each C&D has a health and safety officer and each floor within every building has a fire warden. The Panel was told that evacuation and emergency plans have been developed and that there is a contact officer in the College who has overall responsibility for this function. The Panel confirmed that the health and safety policy with related rules and regulations are well communicated within the College. Whilst a number of student surveys cover aspects of health and safety, evaluation in this area appears limited at present. The College did however elicit formal feedback following recently conducted fire safety training for students and staff and, as a result, the College plans to conduct a fire drill in each C&D annually. The Panel supports this and other areas for improvement identified by the College in this area (Portfolio, p17).

The Panel is of the view that recent initiatives in the area of health and safety have positioned ACT well in terms of this important aspect of its operations. The Health and Safety Committee in particular appears to be impacting very positively on health and safety across the institution. The Panel encourages the College to enhance the evaluation aspect of activities in this area in support of continued improvement.

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

ACT does not have oversight of any associated entities.

2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

ACT has three academic departments: Engineering, Information Technology, and Business Studies. Each department offers a number of credit hours-based 'specialisation programs' up to the level of Higher Diploma. Approximately 40% of the current student population is enrolled on the General Foundation Program (GFP) offered by the English Language Center (ELC). The College is developing its infrastructure in line with its planned expansion and aspirations to become a Higher College of Technology offering Bachelor of Technology degree programs (Portfolio, p.v).

ACT acknowledges student learning by coursework as its 'core process' and further asserts that this core process derives strategic direction from the following Strategic Plan goals: "*We will offer to all students high quality teaching, learning and training opportunities in line with the requirements of market needs*" and "*We will keep up with the modern developments in technology through analysis of market needs in curriculum review processes*" (Portfolio, p.18).

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

2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives

A revised set of ten graduate attributes was developed by the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) of the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) after obtaining input from all the CoTs during the period that the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan was being developed (Portfolio, p.18). These attributes are common to all the CoTs. However, the Panel found no apparent formal evidence of stakeholders' (students, employers, alumni, etc.) involvement in the drafting of the graduate attributes or of relevant benchmarking. In future reviews of these attributes, the Panel would like to see greater involvement of external stakeholders and for this to be reflected in ACT's input into such review processes. The Panel was informed that the next review would be in 2012 when a symposium for this activity would be held.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop mechanisms to ensure external stakeholder input into graduate attribute review activities led by the Ministry of Manpower.

The Panel found a good level of staff awareness of the graduate attributes at ACT and confirmed that these are addressed through teaching and learning and assessed mainly through On-the-Job-Training (OJT). However, ACT acknowledges that at present this is not done in a systematic way as there is no formal mapping of graduate attributes to learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies and assessment tasks; this is something that ACT intends to do in relation to all courses at each level (Portfolio, p.21). The Panel was told that since this mapping exercise would be new for the College, it would be supported by training and facilitated by the QAD. ACT is also aware that it needs to solicit the opinion of alumni and employers concerning the attainment of the graduate attributes; it has conducted relevant surveys but the number of respondents (particularly in the case of employers) was too low to yield meaningful results.

Affirmation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that its graduate attributes need to be clearly mapped to its curricula, formally assessed, and the results used to inform continuous improvement of programs and processes.

2.2 Curriculum

ACT offers credit-hour based, modular Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma programs (in addition to the GFP Section 2.4). The College advises that the curricula for these ‘specialization programs’ were generated by the MoM in 2003 as a result of a major project which involved significant external and industry input and consultation with the CoTs (Portfolio, p.21). The College states that the curriculum model has flexibility in order to meet the changing needs of the market and aims to supply industry with “manpower trained with different skill sets” (Portfolio, p.21)

Each specialization course offered “*has a course outline which consists of goals, objectives and outcomes designed and approved by the Ministry of Manpower*” (Portfolio, p.22). The Panel viewed examples of these and noted that only the ELC has made an attempt to map specific assessments with stated outcomes. The Panel encourages ACT to ensure that this practice is shared and implemented across all programs (as indicated in Section 2.1).

In its 2009-2012 Strategic Plan, ACT set clear sub-goals and strategies relating to curriculum review and development. To achieve its sub-goal to “*improve programs to suit market needs*”, it has identified two strategies: “*ensure the relevance of programs to market needs*” and “*improve the existing courses or introduce new ones based on review of market needs*”. In addition, to achieve its sub-goal to “*ensure practical application of theory*” the College plans to “*recommend the development of new courses which emphasize practical application that meet market needs*”. However, as yet, ACT’s systems and activities in this area remain underdeveloped.

The College states that the Departmental Councils (DCs) review and monitor the curriculum and propose changes to the specialization committees at the MoM (Portfolio, p.22). Further, it is stated that “*DCs collect feedback from students, lecturers and other stakeholders such as employers and providers of OJT opportunities*” to inform recommendations (ibid). The Quality Assurance Manual provides more details of ACT’s process of curriculum review and update. It indicates that the process involves consideration of proposals from DCs by the College Council prior to submission for MoM approval. The Panel learned of a number of examples of curriculum changes having been formally approved but nevertheless found no evidence of a systematic and comprehensive curriculum review process in place at ACT. The DC minutes viewed by the Panel indicated that matters pertaining to program review are only rarely and inconsistently discussed. ACT has made efforts to collect feedback on the curricula from relevant stakeholders, but the survey data reported in the Portfolio (p.24) reflects a divergence between staff and students about the adequacy of the curriculum and the Panel found little evidence of this being investigated in an objective manner.

The Panel noted that ACT has a proposal to constitute Curriculum Committees at College and Department levels “*to assess employer feedback and recommend changes to the curriculum on a continuous basis*” (Portfolio, p.24). The Panel is of the view that, prior to proceeding with this, it is important for the College to conduct a comprehensive and inclusive review of its curriculum review and development systems in the College. The Quality Assurance Office (QAO) and the QAD are well positioned to facilitate this process and ensure synergy between the different committees involved.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology conduct a comprehensive and inclusive evaluation of its current program and curriculum review practices.

2.3 Student Entry Standards

The College advises that students are admitted to ACT in accordance with the MoM directives (Portfolio, p.24). The number of students and the admissions criteria for entry to the ACT Foundation Program are determined annually by the MoM and this is administered through the national Higher Education Admissions Centre. Subsequent progression to the specialization programs is authorized by, and administered through, the MoM Central Registration System. Hence the College accepts every student assigned to it through the central systems. The deans of the CoTs are able to make recommendations to the MoM on entry criteria via the Technical Committee.

ACT has acknowledged high student failure and dropout rates (see Section 2.10). This has been confirmed by the MoM Information System Department using data from the MoM central database. The Panel was informed that a Ministry-level committee has been formed to investigate this situation. Nevertheless, the Panel could not find evidence of purposeful analysis of the data within the College or an attempt to determine systematically the relationship between student entry standards and progression or retention. The Panel suggests that such analysis would helpfully inform strategies to optimise student entry standards.

2.4 Foundation Program

The College indicates that in 2009-2010, 904 out of a total of 2073 students (approximately 44%) were registered on the GFP which is run by the ELC (Portfolio, p.101). The Panel learned that ACT introduced the national Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs in September 2008; these define learning outcomes in English language, IT, mathematics and study skills.

The Panel was pleased to observe that stakeholders interviewed view the GFP positively in terms of providing adequate support and preparing students for post-foundation studies. There is, however, high staff turnover in the ELC and the Panel heard a number of suggestions about possible reasons for this. These included cultural issues, changes in the ELC management and problems of communication. The Panel established that this high turnover is recognised as a problem by ACT but as yet the College does not appear to have fully investigated the causes nor evaluated the effect this has on the Program. The Panel encourages the College to address these areas as a matter of priority (see Recommendation 18).

The College states that “*Students will be eligible for the academic department programs only after they pass mathematics, computing and obtain a minimum grade in English language courses/levels and in house TOEFL or IELTS exams/tests as prescribed by MoM*”. However the Panel did not find evidence of any relevant benchmarking activities in relation to the in-house TOEFL and IELTS examinations and urges the College to address this.

2.5 Teaching Quality

ACT shares with the other CoTs the following strategic goal: “*We will offer to all students high quality teaching, learning and training opportunities in line with the requirements of the market needs*” (Strategic Plan 2009-2012).

In support of this, ACT has developed the following sub-goals: “*recruit competent staff with both academic and industrial experience*”; “*ensure and monitor high quality of teaching*”; “*develop and maintain a culture of best practices in teaching and learning*”; “*ensure practical*

application of theory”; and *“facilitate easy access to student to meet staff for advisement [sic]”*. For each of these sub-goals, ACT has developed enabling strategies and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). ACT’s Quality Assurance Manual also contains a comprehensive chapter on teaching and learning which includes ACT’s teaching and learning strategy as well as its teaching resource strategy and detailed information on course delivery. Staff induction, teaching appraisal and the sharing of good practice are identified in this chapter as key components of enhancing teaching quality.

The Panel found evidence of a number of practices at ACT that address the quality of teaching. The Panel confirmed that teaching staff maintain ‘teaching portfolios’/course files and develop and follow teaching plans. Performance appraisal of teaching quality is carried out by the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA) and Heads of Department (HoDs) with both informal and formal teaching observations conducted. The Panel viewed examples of comprehensive lecturer appraisal reports used across the College that include student feedback and recommendations to lecturers on how to improve. The College indicates that it plans to formalise the follow up and support of lecturers who receive fair or poor performance evaluations (Portfolio, p.31). Foundation Program staff in particular confirmed to the Panel that professional development activities relating to teaching take place. The Panel noted that progress has been made towards ACT entering into a formal benchmarking arrangement with Nizwa CoT that includes the broad area of teaching and learning. This aligns with ACT’s strategy to *“ensure teaching standard by benchmarking with similar institutions of repute”* (Strategic Plan 2009-2012).

The feedback data that ACT has collected to date from HoDs and from students concerning teaching quality reflects contradictory views. This was also the case with feedback that the Panel heard during the audit visit. ACT has identified that the lack of correlation between the generally higher opinions of staff of the quality of teaching and generally lower opinions of students needs to be investigated further (Portfolio, p.31).

The Panel learned that ACT wishes to start developing a College-wide pedagogical framework and the Panel considers that this would serve ACT well. The Panel urges ACT to continue developing and refining its present initiatives towards assuring and improving teaching quality in order to develop more robust systems that operate consistently across the College. These need to include a mechanism for the systematic sharing of good practice in teaching.

Affirmation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the initiatives that Al Musanna College of Technology has taken towards developing an institutional level framework and supporting systems to coordinate its efforts towards ensuring good quality teaching.

2.6 Plagiarism

A definition of plagiarism and procedures for dealing with plagiarism cases are set out in ACT’s Quality Assurance Manual. These procedures align with the Bylaws that detail actions to be taken in cases of cheating. Plagiarism is not specifically mentioned in either the Student Handbooks or the Staff Induction Handbook and ACT acknowledges that at present there is no formal College-wide policy on plagiarism (Portfolio, p.32). The survey data that ACT has collected shows a significant discrepancy between staff and student perceptions regarding students’ awareness of plagiarism and its consequences. The Panel supports ACT in collecting such data whilst noting, as in other cases, that strategies need to be employed towards ensuring the validity of data and its analysis while ensuring that appropriate action is taken. During the audit visit, the Panel found a reasonable level of awareness of plagiarism across the College

community; the Panel met students who were aware that it an academic offence and was told by staff how they identify plagiarism and teach students various avoidance strategies.

The Panel was pleased to learn that a draft policy on plagiarism has now been developed by ACT and this has been forwarded to the MoM QAD; this is to be used towards developing a common plagiarism policy for all the CoTs. The Panel noted that the College intends to support the implementation of the imminent new policy through staff training to address the expected challenges to its implementation.

Affirmation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that a plagiarism policy needs to be developed, disseminated and consistently implemented and supports the steps that the College has taken in this regard.

2.7 Student Placements

All Diploma and Advanced Diploma ACT students undergo formal OJT in addition to College-based Enhanced Practical Training (EPT). Students exiting at Certificate level undergo the latter only. This requirement is set out in the Bylaws and detailed in the CoT On-the-Job Training Assessment Record Book. This comprehensive document is common to all the CoTs and was prepared by the Industrial Link Committee of the MoM.

The Panel learned that the OJT scheme is managed by an overall OJT College Coordinator who, with the help of OJT Coordinators from academic departments, plans the operation through the College OJT Committee. Each department also has a Departmental Industrial Link Subcommittee (DILSC) which has industry representation and EPT assessors.

Supervisor and student feedback surveys relating to OJT indicate an overall opinion that is positive. This was confirmed by the Panel during interviews and examination of OJT reports, log books and assessment records. The Audit Panel met a wide range of employees and all were very supportive of the OJT scheme. Students who were interviewed spoke highly of the arrangements made for them and how this had helped them gain full-time employment. Overall, the Panel found OJT to be working well for ACT and that College staff involved are active in seeking opportunities for improvement. ACT has identified a number of challenges including: insufficient training opportunities available in appropriate specializations; transport and accommodation problems during OJT; perceived complexity of OJT assessment forms; and inhibitions of female trainees. The College has identified actions to be taken to address these issues (Portfolio, p.35). Towards this, the Panel found OJT and DILSC members to be serious in their commitment to, for example, build on the existing database of organisations willing, or potentially willing, to provide placement opportunities for students. Minutes of meetings and interviews indicated active participation by DILSC industry representatives in this area. The College also reiterated to the Panel the need, based on feedback from OJT coordinators, for the OJT Industrial Supervisor feedback questionnaire to be redesigned to make it more concise and reflective of the needs of the employers and the College' (Portfolio p.48). Whilst noting that sustained effort is required in this area, the Panel was encouraged by the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of OJT across the institution and identification of opportunities for improvement and action to be taken. The Panel formed the view that the systems relating to the implementation of the OJT scheme by ACT support provision of a quality practical learning experience for students that aligns with its Mission.

Commendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends AI-Musanna College of Technology for its On-the-Job-Training program which impacts positively on the student learning experience.

ACT has identified that two additional staff are needed to support OJT activities (Portfolio, p. 67). The Panel urges the College to continue monitoring this situation and implement appropriate actions to ensure that the current OJT provision does not become compromised.

2.8 Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation

ACT plans to “ensure that examinations and assessments are conducted based on set standards and guidelines” as a strategy towards its sub-goal to “ensure and monitor high quality of teaching” (Strategic Plan 2009-2012). In accordance with the relevant Bylaws, ACT’s Quality Assurance Manual details the College’s assessment strategy, moderation procedures and physical security of question papers. It also provides an extended commentary on the importance of maintaining academic standards. With respect to standards, the manual states: “Academic Standards in the Colleges of Technology are assured through a coherent set of processes and procedures which cover program and course design, program and course review, marking and grading procedures and approval of grades”. As part of its new policy management system, ACT has also developed a comprehensive Student Assessment Policy. The Panel was pleased to note that this includes specific reference to ensuring that assessments are linked to learning objectives (also see Affirmation 5).

The Panel found ACT’s assessment systems and procedures to be well documented and well embedded, but they are insufficient to ensure academic standards. Whilst ACT has clear procedures for the verification of examination papers and has a system of double marking of examination scripts, the College relies exclusively on internal moderation and there is no external input to the assessment process and moderation. The Panel urges the College to engage in appropriate academic benchmarking activities both within and outside the CoT network in order to assure academic standards.

Recommendation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop strategies to ensure that academic standards of attainment are appropriately benchmarked and externally verified.

The College reports that the failure rate in some courses is much higher than in others and that failure rates between courses can vary considerably (Portfolio, p.36). However, the Panel did not find any concrete steps being taken by ACT to investigate this issue, and considers that attention should be given to this matter (see section 2.10). The Panel was also surprised by the large number of appeals against examination results in 2008-2009 (Portfolio, p.15) although only one case was upheld. The Panel suggests that this area should be monitored and evaluated.

2.9 Academic Security and Invigilation

In its current Strategic Plan, ACT has a strategy and associated KPIs to ensure that examinations and assessments are conducted based on set procedures and guidelines. The College now has a comprehensive Assessment Policy which aligns with the relevant Bylaws and relevant information in the College’s Quality Assurance Manual. This came into effect in November 2009. As per the Bylaws, the Head of Admission and Registration allocates examination halls and invigilators. Implementation of other procedures relating to academic security and invigilation is the responsibility of Departmental Examination Coordinators.

ACT has conducted a staff survey relating to the administration of examinations and states its intention to run training programs to reinforce academic security and invigilation procedures. In addition, the College plans to develop systems to monitor the implementation of the Assessment Policy and associated procedures (Portfolio, p.38). The Panel supports these intentions and views the latter to be of particular importance; the efforts that ACT has made in this area need to be supported by institutional level monitoring, risk assessment and audit to ensure that the decentralized/departmentally administered part of the system is effective across the College. This could be supported by a formal mechanism to share good practice both within the College and with other institutions.

2.10 Student Retention and Progression

Data on student progression, withdrawal and dismissal is recorded by the College on the central MoM student information system. This system allows direct comparison of data with other CoTs. The Panel was very concerned by the data presented by the College (Portfolio, p.39) showing an annual average drop-out rate of approximately 30% of students on the GFP between 2005-2009, and approximately 25% of students from the academic programs over the same period (Portfolio, p.41). Further, the College also reported “*There is currently no systematic documentation on the reasons for dropout*” (ibid).

Both ACT and the MoM acknowledge the high student failure and dropout rates in the College in comparison to other CoTs. The Panel was informed that this has been discussed by the Board of Trustees (BoT) and has been specifically looked into by the College and the Ministry. Minutes of meetings indicate that the College Council also considers student withdrawal and dismissal rates at its end of semester meetings when results are approved. Over the period of the audit visit, the Panel was told of a number of cultural and economic factors prevailing in the Al Batinah region that may have an adverse impact on student retention in ACT as its students are predominantly from that region; however, the Panel was not able to find any supporting documentary evidence to verify these claims. ACT acknowledges that “*To better understand the high dropout rates, the College needs to implement a system for documenting the reasons students leave and identify and implement corrective measures*” (Portfolio, p.41). However, the Panel found no evidence of purposeful analysis of the data available or firm plans in place to do this.

The College states that each academic Center and Department (C&D) maintains a database that allows academic advisors to track the academic progress of their advisees and that advice and counseling is given accordingly (Portfolio, pp.38-39). This system has the potential to provide valuable insight into progression and retention issues. The Panel found evidence of the academic advising system being well understood across the College and being appreciated by students. The College presented data that shows an increase in the number of students progressing from Certificate to Diploma level in 2008-2009. Data is also presented that shows a steady decline in recent years in the number of students on academic probation; the College attributes this to continuous monitoring of student progress and regular advising (ibid).

The Panel encourages the College to continue to monitor and evaluate its academic advising system in relation to student progression and retention, but also to implement additional formal systems to address specifically the student progression and retention issues that it has identified.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Musanna College of Technology develop and implement systems that provide for comprehensive evaluation and analysis of student retention and progression data which informs strategies and mechanisms to address high student failure and drop out rates.

The Panel is of the view that it is reasonable to expect initiatives such as the new College portal that provides enhanced communication and feedback opportunities for students, and the planned expansion of student services (see Section 9.1) to contribute to enhanced retention rates over time.

2.11 Graduate Destinations and Employability

One of the fundamental objectives of ACT is to produce graduates who are employable by local industry; this is inherent in the College's Mission which includes its intent to *“produce graduates who have the professional and personal skills to enter employment with confidence, contributing effectively to the Sultanate's ongoing economic development”*.

The Panel had concerns that to date there is no comprehensive evaluation of employment data, there is limited formal feedback from employers on graduate employees, and an alumni database has only recently been established. The Panel was also concerned that the employment rate of ACT's IT graduates appears to be very low, with less than one in three graduates apparently gaining employment (Portfolio, pp.42-43).

The Panel was encouraged however that ACT has set relevant strategic sub-goals and targets in this area: *“ensure that the college graduates are ready for technical and professional employment”*; *“develop students career plan program [sic]”*; and *“benchmark graduate outcomes with similar institution”* (Strategic Plan 2009-2012). These sub-goals are supported by operational strategies and KPIs. This area falls under the remit of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA) who is supported by the Counseling and Graduates Follow-up Department and a Career Guidance Office (CGO). The Panel appreciates that steps have been taken to integrate the MoM job database into the CGO system of the College (Portfolio, p.42) and that the College has recently engaged in a number of career and employment orientated activities, such as the hosting of a job fair.

ACT recognises that it needs to monitor the destinations of graduates more closely, to support the work of the GCO and to engage in appropriate benchmarking activities (Portfolio, p.43). The College's strategic level plans support this. The Panel urges the College to give priority to supporting the resourcing and implementation of these activities and to ensure that they are effectively coordinated to inform action towards ensuring graduate employment.

Affirmation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that a comprehensive evaluation of graduate destinations and employability is required and supports its plans to develop this aspect of its operations.

3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMS

At the time of the quality audit, ACT did not offer research programs *per se* so this section is not applicable in this Report.

4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

ACT's Vision, (as quoted in Chapter 1) is common for all the CoTs:

ACT intends to become the “College of Choice” for students and for the industry by providing demonstrably high quality teaching, learning and research that makes a significant contribution to ongoing national development. (Portfolio, p.1)

On the other hand, ACT states:

In developing the SP for ACT it became clear that the research aspect of the Vision could not be achieved within the present implementation cycle since the current focus of the College is on providing a skills-orientated technological education, thus research was not addressed in the goals. (Portfolio, p.2)

The College further states that “*recommendations have been made to eliminate the area of Research and Consultancy from the CT model*” (Portfolio, p.44). However, as discussed in Section 1.1, the Panel considers some form of research to be of fundamental importance to higher education institutions. The Panel notes ACT's desire to develop into a Higher College of Technology offering Bachelor of Technology Degree programs (Portfolio, p.v) and, particularly in relation to this, continued omission of a formal research function would not serve ACT well.

The need to review the College's position with respect to research and to align the College's Vision with its activities and aspirations is addressed in Recommendation 1. The Panel found evidence of elements in place to support research and a positive institutional attitude towards staff engaging in research. The Panel considers it necessary for ACT to act in this area, particularly in relation to niche areas and types of research and suggests that the College engages in an institution-wide debate in order to develop a shared understanding of the development of this core function. The College then needs to develop a conceptual framework for staff research that aligns with its Mission and Vision and supports its aspirations (see Recommendation 1).

Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop a conceptual framework for staff research that supports its strategic intent.

5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ACT has a number of committees and groups which work together under the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA) and in collaboration with Student Affairs towards achievement of the College's strategic goals relating to industry and community engagement. This chapter reports on the College's overall planning and management in this area and, specifically, on ACT relationships with the following groups: industry and employers; professions; other education providers; alumni; and the community at large.

5.1 *Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management*

ACT's 2009-2012 Strategic Plan contains the following goal:

“We will foster an open and fruitful relationship with public and private sector organisations and with the community at large”.

ACT claims to view industry and the local community as ‘important external stakeholders’ (Portfolio, p.45) and has developed its own four strategic sub-goals in this area: *“maintain relationship with private and public sectors and industries”*; *“develop relationship with the community”*; *“develop relationship with the media”*; and *“develop relationship with higher education institutions”*. For each of these sub-goals the College has identified enabling strategies and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Promotion of the College's relationship with the local community and private sector is, as per the Bylaws, one of the responsibilities of the College Council. The Council includes, in theory, three members who are representatives from industry; whilst this clearly has the potential to support the College in its aims, the Council minutes indicate that the attendance of two of these members has been too limited to be of benefit. That the participation and contribution of the Council members from the private sector has not been entirely satisfactory is acknowledged by the College (Portfolio, p.4) and the Panel urges ACT to review and act on this. The other committees and working groups that have responsibility for industry and community engagement planning and management are: the Departmental Industrial Link Sub-Committee (DILSC) in each academic department; the On-the-Job-Training (OJT) Department; the Local Community Services (LSC) working group; and the newly established Public Relations and Marketing Committee (PRM) (Portfolio, pp.45, 46).

The College's goals and sub-goals align with the Mission Statement, which includes a dedication to the delivery of high quality technical education and aims to produce graduates who have the professional and personal skills to enter employment with confidence. When College representatives were asked about engagement with the community, it was clear to the Panel that they recognised their community as being primarily industry and commerce. ACT's effective engagement with this part of the community is evidenced by its well-established OJT scheme (see Commendation 5). The Panel also found evidence of growing engagement with the local community; this is likely to be enhanced by the Local Community Services working group (LCS) and the Public Relations and Marketing Committee (PRM) working towards delivery of the Strategic Plan, but there appears to be a lack of detailed planning and coordination in this area (see Affirmation 11).

5.2 *Relationships with Industry and Employers*

ACT's 2009-2012 Strategic Plan has a sub-goal to *“maintain relationship with private and public sectors and industries”*. This is supported by five enabling strategies which include: *“review existing industry partnership and identify potential industries that will hire and train our students*

in their skills"; *"invite representatives from industry to conduct lectures, seminars and workshops*"; and *"find ways to seek sponsorship for college activities and events from industries"*. ACT reports good progress in each of these areas against its KPI targets (Portfolio, pp.47-48). The Panel confirmed, for example, that a functional database for existing and potential employers is in place and also that industrial visits and guest lectures are ongoing. The Panel was pleased to note that ACT has set a KPI target against which it intends to monitor satisfaction with guest lectures, seminars and workshops. The Panel heard that guest lecturers undergo an induction at the College before presenting their material. The Panel noted this as good practice.

Mention has already been made of the working relationship between ACT and the potential employers of the College students through the OJT scheme (see Section 2.7). Interaction with industry and employers is strengthened by the DILSCs which have a membership that includes senior members of staff from industry and ACT. The Audit Panel heard from employers on the committee how highly they regarded the DILSC as a mechanism for liaison, providing opportunity for, for example, seeking to modify the curriculum (particularly in relation to spoken English skills development); giving feedback upon the suitability of ACT graduates they employed; and learning about policies that the MoM would be introducing into the College.

ACT is actively aligning and evaluating its activities in this area in relation to its Strategic Plan and has identified specific actions to be taken in response to feedback; one example of this is the intention to simplify the assessment form used by industry OJT supervisors.

Commendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends AI Musanna College of Technology for engaging constructively with local industry and employers through a variety of activities.

5.3 Relationships with Professions

The Panel considers that it is important for ACT to build links with appropriate professions in order to benchmark the content and development of its programs and to give both staff and students the opportunity to meet their professional colleagues. ACT acknowledges that at present it has no association with professional bodies and no framework within which to develop relationships (Portfolio, p.49). The College indicates that it plans to initiate activity in this area (ibid) but the Panel found little evidence that there is any current link or interest from ACT staff. The Panel concluded that this area needs to be pursued by ACT, particularly as the College has aspirations to teach Bachelor Degree programs.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement an institutional approach to encourage and guide staff and student interaction with professional bodies.

5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers

ACT acknowledges that at present it has no relationship with higher education providers outside the CoT network (Portfolio, p.49). However, in the new Strategic Plan, the College has developed a sub-goal to *"develop relationships with higher education institutions"* which it proposes to do by visiting educational institutions in the Sultanate and establishing MoUs with other higher education providers. Such relationships have the potential to provide a broader input into the College curriculum and also provide the opportunity to benchmark academic and practical standards; having no external input into either of these important areas can constitute an

academic and quality risk. The Panel was pleased to see documentation relating to a benchmarking initiative with Nizwa CoT (also see Sections 1.10, 2.5) and encourages its further development. ACT is at an early stage in its initiatives to forge other relationships with institutions and the Panel views this as an important area of activity for ACT to develop.

Affirmation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that it needs to establish formal relationships with other Higher Education providers, including institutions external to the Colleges of Technology, and to benchmark activities with these providers.

5.5 Relationships with Alumni

ACT plans to improve its relationship with alumni as part of its strategy towards achieving its sub-goal to develop its relationship with the community. This strategy in the Strategic Plan is supported by a KPI which identifies the need for an alumni database and an alumni charter as well as identifying a target for the number of alumni making use of College services (such as those provided by the Career Guidance Office). These plans address the College's recognition that it needs to improve its relationship with its alumni (Portfolio, p51).

The Panel confirmed that a database is in the process of being created by the Student Affairs Department to underpin the College's plans and that the College has an online alumni registration system. The Panel also viewed results of an alumni survey in which respondents rated their satisfaction in areas such as communication with the College, and support from the College with employment and career development. Nevertheless, students who had graduated from ACT who were interviewed by the Panel did not appear to recognise the concept of alumni or understand the purpose of an alumni organisation. The Panel confirmed that an *ad hoc* committee has been formed to develop an alumni charter as indicated in the Portfolio (p.51); this charter is required and the Panel encourages its development to be given priority. The Panel concluded that ACT recognises that an alumni organisation is important to the College and that it is developing all the necessary components for its establishment.

Affirmation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that there is a need for the College to build on its work to produce an alumni charter supported by a relevant framework of management, activities and data.

5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large

The engagement of the College with the local community does not appear to have a detailed planning or coordination dimension. The Panel confirmed that ACT invites the members of the local community to visit the College for Open Days, to attend short courses given by ACT staff or guest lecturers, to use College facilities such as the auditorium, and to attend cultural and social events. However, these events do not seem to be planned well in advance or coordinated. The role of the LCS working group is unclear in this respect with its major role seeming to be the important one of school liaison. The College has identified, from survey data, scope for enhancement of its work in this area. The Panel supports ACT's stated intent to develop ways to measure the success and impact of its activities (Portfolio, p.52). The Panel concluded that while the College engages in many activities with the local community, these interactions need to be formalized.

Affirmation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Musanna College of Technology that its engagement with the local community needs to be better evaluated and for this to inform the planning and management of activities as this function develops.

6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The College states that:

In alignment with two of ACT's strategic goals, Goal 7, 'We will provide excellent student services that support learning in technical education,' and Goal 8, 'To ensure that college facilities are well managed, effectively used, and developed innovatively', the ADSA, ADAF and the ETC, in coordination with the C&Ds, provide Academic Support Services which enable students to develop skills that will enhance their academic achievement as well as their personal and professional growth. (Portfolio, p.54)

In relation to this, the Panel's findings on the following are included in this chapter: registration, enrolment and student records; the library, information and learning technology services, academic advising; student learning support; and teaching resources.

6.1 Academic Support Services Planning & Management

The College reports that the planning and management of its academic support services are aligned with its Mission, Vision, and values and that it aims to provide services that allow students to develop their knowledge and skills accordingly (Portfolio, p.54).

Responsibilities in this area rest with the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA), the Educational Technology Center (ETC), and the Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADAF). The framework within which these offices work is provided by the relevant Bylaws and sections of ACT's Quality Assurance Manual and supported by activity plans that are derived from the Strategic Plan. The College derives feedback from surveys and regularly scheduled meetings and, as a result, advises that it intends to: improve the planning of academic advising schedules; organize events like student exhibits every year; and make more facilities like computer laboratories and the library available by extending their hours (Portfolio, p.55).

While the Panel acknowledges that the College has moved steadily forward in adopting a systems approach to institutional planning and management, the contradictions in the survey results, especially differences between student and staff responses, were of initial concern. The Panel found evidence of significant accomplishments in the area of academic support services planning and management but is of the view that the College is experiencing challenges as it works toward a more mature systematic approach to its operations. The Panel learned of additional strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of planning and management that were not reported in the Portfolio. Examples included: the development of a new College portal designed to expand the scope and use of technology at ACT and the effectiveness of its operations; the rollout of online anonymous surveys on the College portal as well as a forum for discussion on the portal site; and the development of new committees and assessment protocols to address identified problems with ongoing operations and in achieving desired goals. The Panel considers these efforts to be constructive, significant, and demonstrative of the College's commitment to continuous improvement. The Panel encourages ACT to ensure that all survey results are effectively analysed (also see Recommendation 5) and to consider student representation in appropriate committees and decision-making processes as another strategy in its efforts to improve institutional effectiveness.

The Panel also notes that the graduate attributes provide another conceptual framework for planning and management of academic support services. However, it was not clear if these additionally inform academic support services at present. An assessment of how the graduate

attributes are mapped to academic support services planning and management would inform the College on its efforts to support development of those attributes through services provided.

Overall, the Panel found that the College's academic planning and management processes are evolving appropriately, being continuously improved, and that they provide significant support for the students and staff at ACT. In this regard, the pursuance of benchmarking activities and planning that considers 'best practices' beyond the CoTs network will further support the College's efforts to advance its systems approach (see Affirmation 9).

6.2 *Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

ACT students are admitted and enrolled in accordance with the Bylaws and directives of the MoM and, at the time of student intake, ACT receives a list of students assigned by the national Higher Education Admission Center to be admitted to its General Foundation Program (GFP) (Portfolio, p.55). The Registry collaborates with the ELC, and the academic departments and is supported by the secure central Information System Department of the MoM which includes functions such as course registration, course grades and student status data (Portfolio, p.56).

ACT's evaluation of the registry function includes student satisfaction surveys. In interviews with students, the Panel heard that the system had improved since the initial rollout and that it is user-friendly and efficient. The Panel concluded that the College and the MoM had been responsive to feedback and that major concerns with the online registry system indicated in the Portfolio (pp.56-57) had been effectively addressed.

The Panel confirmed that ACT has instituted controlling actions for delegated registry processes at the College level. Record storage is one such delegated process that the College appears to be managing well and securely. Moreover, the Panel learned that the College is in discussion with other CoTs regarding the development of a collaborative records retention policy to standardize practices throughout the CoTs system. The Panel concluded that the Registry appears to be evolving appropriately in its relationship with the MoM in meeting its more localized goals to support students properly through the registry processes and related campus level activities, and to work more collaboratively within the CoTs system.

6.3 *Library*

ACT has a current Strategic Plan sub-goal to '*ensure that the library, laboratories and workshops are well provided with the latest state-of-the-art technology*'. The College has identified various enabling strategies to achieve this with respect to the library which include upgrading the facility, adding to the collections and monitoring usage. The College has a Library Services Policy with accompanying procedures and has a documented library induction process for new staff. The College uses data from its Library Information System and from surveys to determine the effectiveness and appropriateness of its library resources (Portfolio, p.57).

Survey results presented in the Portfolio (p.59), indicate significant student dissatisfaction with the library. Audit Panel interviews with students also highlighted dissatisfaction with the library seating capacity and availability of texts. However, the students voiced satisfaction with the comprehensive 'ebrary' (electronic information resources) system provided by the MoM (which supports all the CoTs) and the addition of computer laboratories elsewhere.

Taking into account *in situ* interviews with library staff, the Panel formed the overall view that significant challenges remain in terms of library administration, development of resources, access to resources, and the overall capacity of the library to support student learning. The College's approach appears sound, but it is facing challenges with respect to implementation. While the College has identified plans to improve its library services (Portfolio, p.59) and also to relocate it in the current Business/IT building upon completion of Phase III of its campus infrastructure

development (see Section 9.1 and Affirmation 13), the Panel is of the view that plans are insufficient in the short-term to meet current student needs or the College's stated objectives.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology take steps to ensure that its library services are enhanced to levels consistent with the College's Mission and Vision.

A Self Access Center (SAC) located in the ELC provides learning resources for GFP students. The Panel viewed an area under construction that will house a new and larger space for the SAC with more seating.

6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

ACT's Information and Learning Technology (ILT) services operate within the context of the following current strategic goals: "*We will provide excellent student services that support learning in technical education*", and "*We will ensure that college facilities are well managed, effectively used, and developed innovatively*".

ILT services, which consist of the College Education Services, Computer Services and Library Services are managed by the Educational Technology Center (ETC) in line with the Bylaws and guided by the Quality Assurance Manual. ILT services are further described by ACT as "*a strategic resource for the enhancement of teaching and learning with technology . . .*" (Portfolio, p.59). The Panel toured the ILT Computer Services facility which provides a wide range of technical support and training services. A comprehensive Computer Services Policy is in place. The Panel confirmed that feedback surveys help evaluate the ILT services and the web-based College portal provides an interactive survey on itself as stated in the Portfolio (pp.59-60).

The Panel was impressed to note the progress made by the ETC in achieving its stated objectives and its resulting positive impact on ACT's teaching/learning objectives and the College's overall operations. This progress includes significant recent expansion of computer laboratory facilities. Challenges that remain in this area relate to internet speed and student e-mail accounts, which are noted in Section 9.3.

6.5 Academic Advising

The Bylaws state, '*Academic advising is one of the responsibilities of the academic staff and part of the teaching and learning process*' (Portfolio, p.61). ACT has a formal Advisement Policy which includes: the assignment process for advisors; the training of advisors; the maintenance of advisory records; the analysis of advisory services; and the relationship with student retention efforts. Staff advisory duties are documented in the Staff Induction Handbook.

The Panel confirmed that the College seeks feedback from students and staff and this has informed the following initiatives: advising schedules have been revised to provide better access to advisees; communication with students through individual advising as well as through open large group discussions has been instituted; and advisors maintain logbooks of interaction with students that must include at least two meetings with students per semester. The Panel was pleased to hear students express their appreciation of the helpful role played by their advisors.

The Panel was told that there is a document trail to track GFP students who attend remedial classes but found less evidence about how poorly performing students on the specialization programs are identified before they fall into academic probation and what additional support is given. The Panel encourages the College to maintain its efforts to monitor and improve this function, particularly in relation to support of student retention and progression (see Section 2.10).

6.6 *Student Learning Support*

ACT states that its co-curricular activities ensure that students are appropriately assisted in their learning and are aligned with student needs (Portfolio, p.63). The Panel confirmed that these activities include: workshops; seminars; exhibitions; guest lectures; short courses; the *Intilaaqah* program (see Appendix B); field visits; and in-house training designed to assist students in their learning and for advancing their skill sets. In addition, the College has subject area clubs, a drama club and a debate club. In 2009 the College also hosted a job fair.

The Panel found that some extra-curricular student learning activities are new initiatives at the College and that measures of success for such efforts have not yet been identified. The College reported that a new budgetary line item for such student learning activities is under serious consideration (see Affirmation 2). The Panel found the College's continued focus on expanding such offerings and opportunities, as well as consideration of a facility to support student activities (see Section 9.1), an indication of on-going progress towards achieving its stated goals and objectives in this area.

6.7 *Teaching Resources*

The College's approach to dealing with teaching resources is informed by its position that ". . . *teaching is the major function of the College*" (Portfolio p.64). The resources/activities that ACT makes available, including the policies and procedures to support those efforts, are aligned to the teaching and learning goals detailed in the current Strategic Plan. The College advises that the Centers and Departments (C&Ds) have primary responsibility for the planning of provision of teaching resources, with specialized areas of responsibility charged to the HoDs in line with requirements of the Bylaws (Portfolio, p.64). The College has conducted staff and student surveys to evaluate its teaching resources and their use.

The Panel found resources for teaching to include a wide variety of aids, devices, and equipment (e.g., classrooms are well equipped with audio/video, multi-media resources along with appropriately licensed software applications). The College provides training/professional development to support such activities with planning integrated with other relevant academic support services committees. Examples of coordinated activities with other committees include the response to student needs that resulted in a dramatic expansion of computer laboratory resources and the expansion of software licensing to provide more access to more computers. The Panel noted that there is a Quality Sub-manual with policies/procedures for the maintenance of laboratory spaces.

Despite initial concerns over the disparity between staff and student levels of satisfaction with teaching resources indicated in survey results (Portfolio, p.65), the Panel determined that teaching resources provision was being appropriately addressed and evaluated. The Panel found that the survey disparities either had been addressed appropriately (e.g., issues related to access to technology), or were issues for which the data reporting may not be reliable (e.g., sample size). Further, the Panel heard in interviews with students and staff that they felt such resources were currently sufficient, especially in the technological areas. Consequently, the Panel acknowledges ACT's efforts to provide adequate support for the College's teaching resources, for progress made, and for its ongoing improvements to advance its Mission and educational objectives.

7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

In support of ACT's Mission to become the "College of Choice" for students and for industry (Portfolio, p.1), Strategic Plan Goal 7 states:

We will provide excellent student support services that support learning in technological education.

This chapter reports on the Panel's findings in relation to this and student support services at ACT which include: career and employment services; accommodation, catering and transportation; medical and counselling services; and social and recreational services and facilities. In addition, this Chapter provides comment on the student profile at ACT and also student satisfaction and climate.

7.1 *Students and Student Support Services Planning & Management*

Student support services planning and management fall under the responsibility of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA). Four departments are managed by the ADSA including Admission and Registration; On-the-Job-Training (OJT); Counseling and Graduate Follow up; and Housing, Student Activities and Graduation. Admissions and Registration and OJT are discussed earlier in this Report (see Sections 2.7 and 6.2). The College has an overall operational plan for Student Affairs comprised of the relevant elements from the Strategic Plan, and each of the four departments develops its own annual activity plan. Survey feedback contributes to annual reporting against the activity plans. This process of planning is discussed in Section 1.6 of this Report. A strengthening of the linkage between the activity plans and the Strategic Plan/ Student Affairs operational plan, and specific linking of this to the budget (see Sections 1.6, 1.7 and Recommendation 3) will help to ensure that adequate resource provision in this area.

The Panel appreciates that student feedback is sought in many areas including those concerning student support services (see Section 7.3). However, the Panel was concerned that there is currently no involvement of students in committees that deal with student issues or in associated decision-making and considers this an important area to address.

Recommendation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology take steps to involve students in committees concerned directly with student affairs and associated decision-making processes.

7.2 *Student Profile*

Student profile data is maintained within the MoM Central Registration (Portfolio, p.68) by the Student Affairs Office. Such data includes student numbers and specializations; gender; level; and socio-economic groups. All students are Omani, with 40-50% female students joining the College between the years 2005-2010 (Portfolio, p.69). The Engineering Department witnessed the largest increase in the number of students enrolled in the last two years (2008-2010) and is the largest of the academic departments, followed by the Information Technology Department and finally the Business Department. Over 40% of ACT's students are currently enrolled in the General Foundation Program. The College presents a detailed analysis of its student profile in the Portfolio and states that it wishes to enhance its analysis by working with MoM to ensure that, for example, statistics regarding regional distribution of students can be generated from the central system (Portfolio, p.71). The Panel appreciates ACT's efforts to make effective use of student profile data.

7.3 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

ACT solicits student feedback through the portal system, a suggestion box located at the Student Affairs Office, and satisfaction surveys (Portfolio, p.72). The College has analysed this feedback to identify a number of areas of improvement. The Panel confirmed examples of actions that have already been taken in response to feedback, which include the library opening hours being increased.

The Panel met a number of students, many of whom appreciated the care and attention exhibited by the College's faculty and staff members. The lack of social facilities and space, and complaints about food services were the major issues voiced to the Panel by ACT students. Such concerns are consistent with the student survey results (Portfolio, p.73). The Panel noted that in relation to these issues, ACT has future plans for the construction of a Student Service Center (see Chapter 9).

7.4 *Student Behaviour*

Student behaviour is governed by ACT's Bylaws and extracts from these Bylaws are included in the Student Handbook; policies regarding student behaviour, punishable offences, the disciplinary system and the student appeals procedure are all included. The Panel learned that reported cases of cheating, grievances and misconduct are dealt with through committees according to standard procedures; these committees include the relatively newly established Investigation Committee and Disciplinary Committee (see Section 1.3). The Panel shares the College's concern over the absence of a professional counsellor (see Section 7.8 below).

The Panel noted that the current Strategic Plan includes a strategy to "provide updated induction and Student Handbook" with an associated Key Performance Indicator (KPI). The Panel confirmed that Student Handbooks are issued during the induction programs conducted for students entering both the GFP and the specialization programs. Specific induction for the College library and IT services is included. The College advises that the induction program is conducted in both Arabic and English to help ensure that students understand what is expected of them and that updated information is typically communicated to students via the College web portal or through student advisors (Portfolio, p.74). The Panel heard positive comments from students across the College regarding their induction. The College has collected feedback on induction through student surveys. This shows moderate satisfaction and has informed planned improvements; despite general concerns regarding the validity of survey data (see Recommendation 5), the Panel urges the College to continue to monitor and evaluate this important activity. The Panel supports the College in its efforts to provide all its students with an effective induction.

7.5 *Career and Employment Services*

As highlighted by the College in the Portfolio (p.75), ACT's Vision and Mission focus on preparing young people for engagement in the economic development of the country. Career and employment services are provided by ACT through the Career Guidance Office (CGO) whose work is directed by the relevant Bylaws, the relevant parts of the ACT Quality Assurance Manual and the current Strategic Plan. The College reports that the CGO provides students with help in areas that include career planning, preparing resumés and cover letters and in preparing for interviews. It also facilitates on-campus interviews (Portfolio, p.75). The Panel confirmed that CGO also follows up with graduates who are still unemployed. Despite challenges that exist for ACT regarding graduate destinations and employability (see Section 2.11), the Panel heard students and alumni speaking highly of the career and employment services currently being provided by ACT. The Panel urges the College to maintain its monitoring and evaluation of these services and to progress with plans for improvement.

7.6 Student Finances

A monthly allowance is provided to students by the MoM to cover transportation and housing expenses. Whilst ACT's role in administering this seemed to the Panel to be quite resource intensive, this monthly process appears to run adequately. The College reports that student survey feedback data indicates that a majority of students do not agree that their allowances are sufficient (Portfolio, p.77). The Panel was also informed through interviews with students that the monthly allowance is insufficient to meet students' needs. The Panel was pleased to learn that this issue is currently being formally studied at ministerial level. Nevertheless, the Panel urges the College to continue to monitor this situation and its impact on student learning and to communicate its findings to relevant stakeholders.

7.7 Accommodation, Catering and Transport

ACT does not provide any on-campus accommodation for students. Many students reside with their families. The College advises that the Student Affairs 'Department of Housing, Student Activities and Graduation' provides some assistance for students to find nearby housing (Portfolio, p.77). Meals and snacks services are provided through staff and student canteens. Transportation is provided by ACT only for industrial visits, tours and medical emergencies. The Panel confirmed that the College has solicited feedback on these services and has been responsive to findings: for example, low students satisfaction with the College's cafeteria has led to formal action against the current contract holders.

7.8 Medical and Counselling Facilities

ACT has a small clinic staffed by two nurses which provides basic health services for students and staff (Portfolio, p.78). A nearby governmental clinic is available for cases that require medical attention. The College's current Strategic Plan states its intention to "*provide effective advice and counseling service to students in need*" as one of its strategies to achieve its sub-goal to "*establish effective communication between students and ADSA*". The College has no student counsellors at present, but states that it intends to appoint such specialists (Portfolio, p.75). Particularly in view of the poor retention and progression rates discussed earlier in this Report (see Recommendation 9), the Panel supports this intention.

7.9 International Student Services

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

7.10 Social and Recreational Services and Facilities

ACT claims to support social, sport, recreational, cultural and other activities (Portfolio, p.79). The College also has program specialisation-oriented clubs, general interest clubs (photography, drama, etc) and a fun club. The ADSA is responsible for all these activities. The College also advises that it has a number of sports facilities (football, basketball etc) available for students (Portfolio, p.80). Students interviewed by the Panel advised that the College's sports facilities had been improved following feedback from the male students. Student club members who were interviewed indicated that they value their participation in club activities and found staff supportive, but they also stated that better facilities were required and they would like more clubs and activities for female students. The results of the student survey conducted by ACT in relation to its social and recreational services and facilities indicated low satisfaction in general. The Panel found the College receptive to this feedback and supports its stated intentions to improve its facilities and to foster greater student involvement in the management and planning of activities (ibid). The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area and noted that central funding for extra-curricular activities at the CoTs and, longer term, the development of a Student Service Center at ACT are both currently being considered at ministerial level (see Affirmation 2 and Affirmation 13).

Affirmation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Musanna College of Technology that there is a need for the College to enhance its social and recreational services and facilities, and in particular to ensure the provision of adequate funding in this area, and supports its efforts towards addressing these requirements.

Students also indicated that they have a wider requirement for general services and recreational space. The Panel was pleased to see long term plans for the establishment of a Student Service Center (see Section 9.1) that will cater to these needs. However, action also needs to be taken more immediately to cater for the requirements of the existing student population.

Recommendation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Musanna College of Technology take steps to ensure that the needs of all its students, and in particular its female students, are adequately provided for in terms of social space and other non-academic student amenities.

8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

ACT states:

To impart quality education, institutions should be staffed with well-qualified and experienced teaching and support personnel. Accordingly ACT endeavours to engage the best qualified and experienced staff, and provide an atmosphere which offers its staff a suitable environment for professional development. (Portfolio, p.81)

The above statement aligns with the College's Bylaws and its specific statements of intent in the current Strategic Plan. Within this context, this chapter reports on the Panel's findings in areas that include: HR planning and management; staff profile; staff recruitment and selection; staff induction; professional development; performance planning and review; promotion and other incentives; severance; staff organisational climate and retention; and Omanisation.

8.1 Human Resources Planning & Management

Human Resources (HR) planning and management at ACT is informed primarily by the Bylaws and Strategic Plan. In support of its main strategic goals relating to teaching and learning and to staff, ACT has set the following relevant sub-goals together with enabling strategies and associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): *“recruit competent staff with both academic and industrial experience”*; *“provide professional development opportunities to staff”*; *“promote hard work among staff”*; *“develop leadership and creative thinking”*; and *“provide staff induction to new staff”*.

Within the College, responsibility for HR planning and management is shared by the College Dean and Assistant Deans in collaboration with the Centers and Departments (C&Ds). The HR Department, which is supervised by the Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADAF), essentially follows up on HR issues and maintains records (Portfolio p.81). Staff are classified as academic, academic support, and non-academic. Academic and academic support staffing requirements are initially generated by C&Ds and the Assistant Deans identify non-academic staffing requirements. The Panel confirmed that ACT has internal processes in place to identify staffing needs in a timely way. These are consolidated at College level and submitted to the MoM as required for approval and subsequent action.

Recruitment of staff is performed by the MoM or through contracted services. The Panel learned that only qualified non-academic staff can be assigned to ACT by the MoM; ACT has final approval of academic and academic support staff selections. MoM has primary responsibility for the initial identification of academic and non-academic staff with appropriate qualifications for the College to consider. The College can interview applicants only after the MoM has determined and approved the staffing needs of all the CoTs and after initial vetting of applicants (by the MoM and/or a recruitment agency). The Panel was satisfied that ACT has systems in place for processing applicants that support its stated goals for HR once they have received applicant information from the MoM. Hiring contracts for ACT vary and are dependent upon the recruitment entity involved (as further discussed in Section 8.3).

Individual C&Ds conduct staff inductions and also provide professional development opportunities for academic and academic support staff and conduct staff appraisals. The College collects feedback data on staff support services and, whilst the College reports that ‘the results show overall effectiveness’ (Portfolio, p.82), it has plans to strengthen this feedback process. The College also plans to *“...form new committees with explicit responsibilities and direction to further enhance the efficiency of HR planning and management to better meet requirements of*

Article 27C Bylaws” (Portfolio, p.82). Further, ACT states that it plans to develop and implement a mechanism to support long term planning of staff and staff support services (Portfolio, p.82). The College is also aware that at present there is no formalized mechanism for addressing staff grievances and the Panel supports its stated intention to address this (Portfolio, p.92).

8.2 *Staff Profile*

ACT’s staff profile is informed by, and aligns with, its Strategic Plan requirements and comprises male and female staff of a range of nationalities. The College’s analysis of its staff profile has led the College to plan to develop a database for staff profiles to improve information retrieval and enhance opportunities for analysis (Portfolio, p.85). The Panel found that the College is conscientiously monitoring its staff profile.

8.3 *Recruitment and Selection*

“To recruit competent staff with academic and industrial experience” is a Strategic Plan sub-goal and this informs ACT’s recruitment and selection policies, processes and procedures.

Given the critical nature of this area to the College’s operations, the Panel spent considerable time investigating this area and was fully apprised of the recruitment process. This complex process (outlined in Section 8.1) highlights the need for efficiency at the local level to move the processes forward in a timely manner where possible. The Panel was pleased to note that ACT plans to develop and implement an evaluation process on staff recruitment and selection (Portfolio, p.87) and to coordinate with the MoM and recruiting agencies to ensure that staff recruited join the College on time; this latter intention addresses ACT’s observation that *“there is often a delay in the arrival of staff, particularly lecturers ...”* (ibid). The Panel considers it important for the College to act on its intentions in this area.

Aside from the Panel’s examination of the recruitment and selection processes, the Panel also explored the apparent disparity in employment terms and conditions that seem to be dependent upon how an individual is contracted. MoM contracts may be either Civil Service governed or ‘special’ contracts and agency contracts, which are governed by the Omani Labour Law, vary between the five different recruitment agencies currently contracted by the MoM to recruit for the CoTs. Overall, the Panel appreciated the complexities involved with the recruitment process and found the College’s strategies for improvement of those processes to be aligned with its Strategic Plan and its relational responsibilities with the MoM. Nevertheless, the Panel urges the College to ensure that its evaluation mechanisms effectively address how the dual system of direct recruitment and recruitment through agencies impacts on its operations (also see Recommendation 16).

Recommendation 15

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation process to support effective selection and recruitment of staff.

8.4 *Induction*

ACT’s staff induction is directed by its Strategic Plan sub-goal to *“ensure that new staff receives [sic] a full and formal induction on arrival”*. Induction policies and activities align with the relevant section of ACT’s Quality Assurance Manual. The C&Ds have primary responsibility for induction, and the College has a comprehensive Staff Induction Handbook. The ADAF has oversight responsibilities for the induction of administrative staff.

The Panel confirmed, and was pleased by, the comprehensive and supportive nature of the College's staff induction process. Further, the Panel was informed that a committee was being developed to ensure more consistency of the process across the College as well as to enhance the existing evaluation system. The Panel supports these intentions and acknowledges that continued work in this area should support efforts to increase retention rates of staff.

8.5 *Professional Development*

ACT has developed a Strategic Plan sub-goal to “*provide professional development opportunities to staff through in-house training*” supported by enabling strategies and associated KPIs. These are aligned with the College policies, processes and resources to support ongoing effectiveness of staff through skills training, teacher training, and other internal/external activities. The College advises that HoDs of C&Ds are responsible for identifying professional development needs (Portfolio, p.89) although the relevant section in the College's Quality Assurance Manual indicates that needs may be identified by staff members themselves. The Panel noted that employee contracts may dictate policies for professional development dependent upon employee classification (i.e. academic, academic support or non-academic staff).

The Panel found evidence of both in-house and external professional development activities at ACT, ranging from individual lectures and workshops to MoM support for Omanis to enroll in higher degrees with overseas universities. In-house activities are individually evaluated by participants. While surveys indicate high rates of satisfaction with ACT's current practices, the Panel remained concerned about how the College ensures that academic staff and academic support staff remain up-to-date in their subject specializations and practices in the field. The Panel found that a sharper focus on professional development in relation to academic currency was necessary to achieve stated goals and suggests that the College develop an institutional professional development plan that could provide direction for such initiatives and activities, as well as inform staff on the development of their own individual plans. The College states that it plans to establish a committee to coordinate the professional development of staff and to ensure that training programs offered align with staff and institutional needs (Portfolio, p.88). The Panel acknowledges that the College's efforts in this area are now supported by established Staff Development Committees in the C&Ds, but considers that further institutional level direction is required.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop institutional level systems to ensure that the subject authority of its academic staff is maintained through the provision of appropriate professional development activities.

8.6 *Performance Planning and Review*

ACT's Strategic Plan includes the following two strategies to support its sub-goal of providing professional development opportunities to staff: “*conduct a fair staff appraisal on a regular basis*”, and “*link staff appraisal to staff development*”. Each is supported by a related KPI. The College has developed comprehensive procedures for conducting staff appraisals. These are documented in the College's Quality Assurance Manual and align with the requirement of the Bylaws. The College advises that the separate standardized appraisal forms for academic staff, academic support staff and for non-academic staff developed by ACT have been distributed for use by other CoTs (Portfolio, p.89). The English Language Center (ELC) has its own appraisal form. The College acknowledges that at present it does not have a system to analyse staff satisfaction regarding its appraisal system (ibid).

The Panel confirmed that the staff appraisal systems are well established in the College. The Panel supports the College's stated intentions to continue to try to create a direct link between

staff appraisal and training needs and also to establish a feedback system to determine staff satisfaction with the process (Portfolio, p.90).

8.7 *Promotion and Other Incentives*

The College's approach to this area is based upon criteria set by the MoM and the Civil Service Law (which relates to MoM contracted staff and thus primarily to Omanis) as well as in relation to its Strategic Plan sub-goal to "*Promote hard work among staff and reward excellent performance of staff*". In relation to this, appraisals are performed annually as directed in the Bylaws and are submitted to the MoM and to respective agencies (Portfolio, p.90).

There is a well-defined and clearly communicated promotions system for Omani staff and the College states that "*eligible staff are put into higher grades automatically when they are due for promotion*" (Portfolio, p.90). Another performance incentive for MoM-contracted staff is the Employee of the Month system, which was implemented in 2008-2009 and through which contracted employees have received monetary bonuses (ibid). However, there is no such well-defined system for non-Omani staff.

Staff survey results indicate that very few staff believe the College has a suitable promotion and incentive scheme. There is no College-wide performance-based incentive scheme and the College advises that it has very limited control in this area (Portfolio, p.91). The Panel agrees that the circumstances surrounding standardization of promotion and incentive initiatives for staff that are hired under different contracts with different statutory language are complex. However, the Panel was concerned that promotion and incentive disparities for non-Omani staff could deter efforts to create a more harmonised community within the College and could also impact negatively on staff retention. The Panel encourages the College to identify promotion and incentive strategies that can lessen confusion surrounding current policies as well as establish equity in the system.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology review the impact of the existing staff promotion and reward systems in operation at the College for their impact on staff performance and retention, and develop strategies to address identified areas of concern.

8.8 *Severance*

The College indicates that its approach to severance is governed by Civil Service Law for Omani staff and by the terms of each contract for non-Omani staff. The Panel noted the College's statement that "*Omanis under Civil Service Law cannot be terminated*" (Portfolio, p.91). Therefore, citizenship or contracts determine which dismissal and appeals processes are used. ACT states, "*The College so far has no mechanism to measure the effectiveness of severance procedures*" (ibid) and as yet has no written policy on termination procedures. Service benefits are governed by the MoM or by contractual agreement. The Panel was pleased to note that exit interviews commenced in 2009 which provide feedback not collected previously.

8.9 *Staff Organisational Climate and Retention*

The College indicates that it tries to maintain an appropriately constructive and effective climate for staff (Portfolio, p.92). In support of this, staff undergo a comprehensive induction process (see Section 8.4) and an *ad hoc* committee organizes staff social events. The Panel confirmed that staff satisfaction surveys were initiated in 2008-2009.

Despite the College's efforts in this area, the Panel remained concerned over the high staff attrition rates; the College reports a "*high turnover in IT in 2007 and 2008*" and a "*consistently high turnover in the ELC*" (Portfolio, p.93). Feedback surveys indicate that staff leave for better opportunities elsewhere or for other personal reasons. The Panel agrees with the College that "*Staff turnover data needs to be more carefully considered in planning ways in which the College can improve retention rates*" (Portfolio, p.93). It is clear this area has a high degree of integration with other areas of activity within the College (e.g., Governance and Management, Academic Support Services, Staff Support Services, and General Support Services and Facilities), and the Panel considers that effort to evaluate the organizational climate more comprehensively is required. Improvement of staff retention would benefit the institution in a variety of ways. It would, for example, help to ensure consistent quality of the provision of the learning programs.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that AI Musanna College of Technology develop and implement a comprehensive staff satisfaction evaluation system that informs the development of strategies to improve staff retention.

8.10 Omanisation

Efforts to nationalise staff are an ongoing CoT-wide endeavor. In 2005 the MoM launched a five-year initiative to increase Omani participation as Assistant Lecturers at the CoTs through a systematic process of education and training (Portfolio, p.93). Under this scheme, graduates who meet requirements are sent overseas to attain higher degrees and upon their return they are employed as instructors with appropriate mentoring. In 2008-2009, the MoM launched a second, similar, five-year initiative targeting Omanis working as technicians.

ACT reports that in 2009 two Omanis joined the IT Department as Assistant Lecturers after completing Bachelor degrees and three Omanis joined the ELC as Assistant Lecturers having completed Master's degrees. At the time of submission of the Portfolio, Omanis comprised 13% of the academic staff. Three ACT Omani technicians have been sponsored by the MoM to pursue Bachelor degrees (Portfolio, p.94).

The Panel recognizes that there has been moderate success with Omanisation in the academic areas at ACT. The Panel appreciates that training Omanis to assume instructional duties at the CoTs is a long-term process and that the initiatives that have been implemented should be fruitful over time. On the other hand, efforts with non-academic staff have brought significant results; the College reports 88% Omanisation of administrative staff (Portfolio, p.94). The Panel encourages the College to take steps to ensure that it takes full advantage of the systems in place to support its Omanisation efforts.

9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

ACT states:

.... the quality of its General Support Services and Facilities is a measure of its support for the mission of the College, which is to provide high quality technical education, and for its relationships with the community in which it finds itself.
(Portfolio, p95)

This chapter reports on the Panel's findings in relation to the general planning and management of these services and, in particular, to public relations and marketing, communication services, and facilities management.

9.1 *General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management*

In line with the Bylaws, general support services and facilities planning and management fall under the responsibility of Administration and Financial Affairs, Student Affairs and Educational Technology Center (ETC). Centers and Departments (C&Ds) determine their needs each year based on their operational plans.

The College reports that the campus expansion program is proceeding as scheduled (Portfolio, p.95). Phase I of this included an Auditorium and the Electrical and Electronics Engineering buildings which were completed in 2006-2007. Phase II included the new Mechanical Engineering building and English Language Center (ELC) both of which were viewed by the Panel. Both staff and students had high levels of praise for the completion of these developments, although the project was delayed (and the initial scope was reduced), which presented the College with a number of challenges. The College community is clearly eager for the Phase III of the overall plan to commence; this includes a new IT and Business Studies building and new Administration building and the conversion of the current IT and Business Studies areas into a new and expanded library. At the time of the audit visit, the Panel was told that final ministerial approval of the budget for Phase III was still pending. The Panel supports the College's efforts to upgrade its facilities and infrastructure to align with its Mission and Vision.

Affirmation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with AI Musanna College of Technology that its physical infrastructure needs further development and supports its achievements, endeavors and on-going developments in this area.

The Panel was pleased to view additional plans for a comprehensive Student Services Center; the Panel was advised that the plan includes a section for Student Affairs, a recreation center, a shop, a restaurant, a common library and a conference hall, and that this proposal has also been submitted for ministerial consideration and approval. The Panel was informed that this development will be considered within a five year period commencing in 2011. It has been noted earlier in this Report that until such a facility is developed, ACT needs to ensure that the student body is adequately catered for with respect to student services (see Recommendation 14).

9.2 *Public Relations and Marketing*

Public relations and marketing activities fall under the responsibility of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA) and is guided by Goal 5 of the Strategic Plan which states that ACT intends to *"foster an open and fruitful relationship with public and private sector organizations*

and with the community at large” (Portfolio, p.96). ACT advises that it uses print and electronic media to create awareness about its programs, hosts a range of activities involving members of the community and supports its students in taking part in student activities led by organizations external to the College (ibid). These activities are covered comprehensively in the College’s Quality Assurance Manual but, as discussed in Section 5.6, they are in need of better coordination (see Affirmation 11) and need to be informed by a more comprehensive evaluation system. In this respect, the Panel supports ACT’s intention to put a rigorous evaluation system in place to measure the effectiveness of the Public Relations and Marketing activities conducted in the region by ACT and MoM (Portfolio, p.98).

9.3 *Communication Services*

In the overall area of Governance and Management, ACT has set a sub-goal to “*Maintain effective communication channels which reflect transparency and sense of ownership*” and an enabling strategy to “*ensure that information is accessible to staff and students on a timely basis*”, which is supported by an associated KPI. ACT communicates with its staff and students through a variety of means including the College’s intranet portal and website. The College reports that all staff are provided with e-mail account (Portfolio, p.98). The Panel was informed by students that General Foundation Program (GFP) students are not provided with e-mail accounts or internet access, but also that some students on the specialization programs do not have these facilities; students complained to Panel members about this and also the slow speed of the internet. ACT recognizes these problems and there are plans to upgrade its Internet facilities (Portfolio, p.99), which the Panel strongly supports.

Affirmation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Musanna College of Technology that additional capacity should be provided on its main computer server to allow for effective Internet access and e-mail communication by students.

The College has used surveys to solicit feedback on some but not all aspects and means of communication within the College. The College reports positive feedback from staff on the intranet portal, the College website and the use of shared folders (ibid). The Panel urges the College to take steps to broaden its evaluation activities so that they form part of a cycle of improvement in relation to the College’s goals in this area.

9.4 *Facilities Management*

ACT has the following strategic goal: “*We will ensure that the college facilities are well managed, effectively used, and developed innovatively*”. In support of this, the College has developed the following two sub-goals relating specifically to facilities management, each of which is supported by enabling strategies and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): “*achieve excellence in management of college facilities and learning resources and equipment*” and “*provide a healthy and safe environment*”.

Management of ACT facilities falls under the responsibility of the Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADAF). The Administrative Affairs Department carries out regular facilities maintenance and management. This remit includes the maintenance and management of academic facilities, such as classrooms and workshops, supporting facilities such as staff residences and College vehicles, and also the College grounds. The MoM specifically funds, and subsequently audits, facilities management expenditure. A computerized database of equipment and furniture is maintained by ACT. Services such as catering, cleaning and gardening are contracted out according to a set procedure. Staff and students have been surveyed on their satisfaction in this area (Portfolio, pp.99-100).

The Panel formed the view that the facilities management function in ACT runs smoothly and has been marred only by recurrent power outages. The College has now installed a standby power supply to address this. The Panel encourages ACT to work towards permanent resolution of any underlying issues with the power supply to the College.

ACT has responded to the negative feedback it has received on the cafeteria service provided by the current contractor (Portfolio, p.100) as discussed earlier in this Report (see Section 7.7).

APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

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APPENDIX B. ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

ACT	AI Musanna College of Technology
ADAA	Assistant Dean for 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.
BoT.....	Board of Trustees
C&Ds	Centers and Departments (The Centers include the English Language Center and the Learning Technology Center)
CoT	College of Technology
CGO	Career Guidance Office
DC	Departmental Council
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.
DILSC	Departmental Industrial Link Sub-Committee
ELC	English Language Center
EPT	Enhanced Practical Training
ETC	Educational Technology Center
Executive Officer	An OAAA staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide professional guidance and support.
External Reviewer	A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the OAAA's various external review panels.
GFP	General Foundation Program
HEI	Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider)
Ibid	indicates the reference cited immediately before
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ILT	Information and Learning Technology
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> .
<i>Intilaaqah</i>	A Shell initiative operating in Oman that promotes entrepreneurship for young Omanis by providing training and counseling
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LSC	Local Community Service

MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
MoM.....	Ministry of Manpower
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oac.gov.om)
OAAA Board.....	The governing body of the Oman Accreditation Council
OFI	Opportunity for improvement.
OJT	On-the-Job-Training
OQF.....	Oman Qualifications Framework.
Panel Chairperson	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member	An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
Portfolio.....	see <i>Quality Audit Portfolio</i> .
PRM	Public Relations and Marketing Committee
QAD	Quality Assurance Department (Ministry of Manpower)
QAO	Quality Assurance Office (Al Musanna College of Technology)
Quality Assurance	The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.
Quality Audit.....	An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision.
Quality Audit Portfolio.....	The report produced as the result of a self study. Also forms the main submission made to the OAAAC by the HEI being audited.
Quality Audit Report	A public report published by the OAAA which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel's External Review of a HEI.
Quality Enhancement	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing <i>approach, deployment</i> and <i>results</i> .
Random Interview	An interview conducted <i>in situ</i> by individual Panel Members during the Audit but separately from the main interview sessions.
Results	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> .
Sic	indicates that the preceding segment of the quote was copied faithfully, in spite of a mistake
System.....	In this Report, <i>system</i> refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

