



# Oman Accreditation Council

## Report of an Audit of the College of Applied Sciences Ibri

**April 2010**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Overview of the Quality Audit Process .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>How to Read This Report .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Executive Summary of Findings .....	5
Summary of Commendations .....	6
Summary of Affirmations .....	7
Summary of Recommendations .....	8
<b>1 Governance and Management .....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 The Audit Context .....	10
1.2 Mission, Vision and Values .....	10
1.3 Governance .....	10
1.4 Management.....	11
1.5 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance.....	12
1.6 Strategic and Operational Planning.....	13
1.7 Financial Management.....	14
1.8 Risk Management .....	14
1.9 Policy Management.....	14
1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems .....	15
1.11 Student Grievance Process.....	15
1.12 Health and Safety .....	15
1.13 Oversight of Associated Entities.....	16
<b>2 Student Learning by Coursework Programs.....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives.....	17
2.2 Curriculum .....	18
2.3 Student Entry Standards.....	19
2.4 Teaching Quality.....	19
2.5 Plagiarism .....	20
2.6 Student Placements .....	20
2.7 Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation.....	20
2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation.....	21
2.9 Student Retention and Progression .....	21
2.10 Graduate Destinations and Employability .....	22
<b>3 Student Learning by Research Programs.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>4 Staff Research and Consultancy .....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Research Planning and Management .....	24
4.2 Research Performance.....	25
4.3 Research Funding Schemes .....	25
4.4 Consultancy Activities .....	25
4.5 Ethics and Biosafety.....	25
4.6 Intellectual Property.....	26
4.7 Professional Development for Research .....	26
4.8 Research Teaching Nexus .....	26
<b>5 Industry and Community Engagement.....</b>	<b>27</b>

5.1	Industry and Community Engagement Planning and Management.....	27
5.2	Relationship with Industry and Employers .....	28
5.3	Relationships with Professions .....	28
5.4	Relationships with Other Education Providers .....	28
5.5	Relationships with Alumni.....	28
5.6	Relationships with the Community at Large.....	28
<b>6</b>	<b>Academic Support Services .....</b>	<b>30</b>
6.1	Academic Support Services Planning and Management.....	30
6.2	Registry (Enrolment and Student Records).....	31
6.3	Library.....	31
6.4	Information and Learning Technology Services .....	31
6.5	Academic Advising .....	32
6.6	Student Learning Support .....	33
6.7	Teaching Resources.....	33
<b>7</b>	<b>Students and Student Support Services .....</b>	<b>34</b>
7.1	Students and Student Support Services Planning and Management .....	34
7.2	Student Profile.....	35
7.3	Student Satisfaction and Climate .....	35
7.4	Student Behaviour.....	35
7.5	Career and Employment Services .....	36
7.6	Student Finances .....	36
7.7	Accommodation, Catering and Transport .....	36
7.8	Medical and Counselling Facilities.....	37
7.9	International Student Services.....	37
7.10	Social and Recreational Services and Facilities.....	37
<b>8</b>	<b>Staff and Staff Support Services .....</b>	<b>38</b>
8.1	Human Resources Planning and Management.....	38
8.2	Staff Profile.....	39
8.3	Recruitment and Selection .....	39
8.4	Induction .....	39
8.5	Professional Development .....	40
8.6	Performance Planning and Review .....	40
8.7	Promotion and Other Incentives .....	41
8.8	Severance .....	41
8.9	Staff Organisational Climate and Retention.....	41
8.10	Omanisation .....	41
<b>9</b>	<b>General Support Services and Facilities .....</b>	<b>42</b>
9.1	General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management.....	42
9.2	Public Relations and Marketing.....	42
9.3	Communication Services .....	43
9.4	Facilities Management .....	44
<b>Appendix A.</b>	<b>Audit Panel .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Appendix B.</b>	<b>Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms .....</b>	<b>46</b>

## OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This Quality Audit Report (the 'Report') documents the findings of a quality audit by the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) of the College of Applied Sciences (CAS) Ibrī. It comments on the CAS Ibrī mission and vision, and the appropriateness and effectiveness of CAS Ibrī's systems for achieving that mission and vision. Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman's institutional accreditation process. It is designed to provide a level of assurance to the public about the quality of CAS Ibrī's activities, and constructive feedback to CAS Ibrī to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The quality audit commenced with CAS Ibrī undertaking a self study of its mission, vision and systems. The results were summarized in CAS Ibrī's *Quality Audit Portfolio* (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAC by the due date of 31 January 2009.

The OAC 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 teleconference) on 15 March, 2009 to consider CAS Ibrī's Portfolio. Following this, the Audit Panel Chairperson and Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to CAS Ibrī on 6 April 2009 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel's audit visit.

Prior to the audit visit, the Panel invited submissions from the public about the quality of CAS Ibrī's activities. Two submissions were received and considered.

The audit visit took place over 3-5 May 2009. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 130 people, including governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. They also visited a selection of venues and considered additional materials.

No information provided after 5 May, 2009 (being the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit.

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

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAC Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAC Board on 3 April 2010.

The OAC was established by Royal Decree No. 74/2001. Among its responsibilities is the external review of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. For further information, visit the OAC website (<http://www.oac.gov.om>). Full details of the quality audit process are available in OAC's *Quality Audit Manual* (available from <http://www.oac.gov.om/qa/HEI/>).

## HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

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

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

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

This Report contains a number of references to source evidence examined 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 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 in the text of the Report.

### *Executive Summary of Findings*

CAS Ibri is one of six institutions in the Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS) network under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The Colleges evolved out of six Colleges of Education. The Colleges of Education were discontinued as they had achieved their aim of providing the education sector with sufficient numbers of qualified Omani teachers. The establishment of the CAS network in 2005 was based on the need to produce graduates more aligned to the needs of Omani business and industry. Each College in the CAS network has a particular discipline focus. In 2008, CAS Ibri had 1402 students, studying in a Foundation Program and four specialised programs: Information Technology, Communication Studies, Design and International Business Administration. In line with the evolving MoHE strategy to develop Centres of Excellence within the CAS in the network, from 2009 CAS Ibri will offer only two specializations in Design and in Information Technology.

The MoHE, rather than the individual Colleges in the CAS network, maintains an affiliate agreement with the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium (NZTEC), a consortium of five New Zealand Universities and Colleges and a social sector consulting firm. There is a high level of centralized control by the MoHE over the College's activities and the introduction of the new academic programs. At the time of quality audit, CAS Ibri was nearing the conclusion of its third year of operation with the fourth year of its bachelor degrees still to be offered; hence the College had no graduates from these new programs.

The Portfolio was well presented and refreshing in its openness and honesty regarding the findings of its self review. It contained many references to supporting documents which were not provided with the initial submission. Once these additional supporting materials were received by the Panel, a more comprehensive review of the Portfolio could take place. The Panel found the Portfolio focus was mainly on the Approach and Deployment aspect of the ADRI method (the 4 step cycle of quality assurance involving Approach, Deployment, Results and Improvement: see Appendix B). There was little evidence of data collection to inform process improvements or evidence of established quality assurance systems.

Colleges in the CAS network share common, clearly articulated, mission, vision, values and strategic planning goals developed by the MoHE. The Panel believes these are appropriate and will guide CAS Ibri into the future. The CAS Ibri Operational Plan aligns well with the central strategic planning process. However, the Panel noted that the lack of measurable performance indicators and targets in the Operational Plan will make it difficult for the College to measure its achievements against these strategic goals.

Whilst the CAS mission to "create" current knowledge signals that the College should develop an explicit research agenda, albeit of a practical and applied nature, the Panel found little development in this area with neither a research plan nor the associated policy, procedures or resourcing to support activity of this nature.

There has been strong central control of the MoHE over CAS Ibri in the transition to the new Applied Science focus and in the introductory phase of the NZTEC academic programs. However, the Panel considers that a more devolved model of operation will best serve the College in the next phase of its development. This is particularly the case where the College needs to develop greater connections with

business and industry to ensure graduates are work-ready to assist in the development of Oman. For this reason, amongst others, the Panel noted the need to strengthen the planned engagement with business and industry.

The Panel was impressed with the dedication of the senior management of the College in providing leadership to reposition the College and with the commitment of staff to supporting students to fulfill their learning goals. This dedication and commitment exists in a challenging environment in transition, where evolving centralised management systems and resourcing models have often meant inadequate, or slow, provision of teaching facilities and human resources.

Overall, students were pleased with their experiences at the College; however, the Panel was concerned with the underperformance of male students and their unequal access to facilities which may contribute to this.

The NZTEC affiliation has delivered, in most cases, appropriate curriculum and teaching and learning resources and the success of its implementation to date reflects the commitment of the MoHE and CAS Ibri staff. Any issues with this process relate mainly to contextualisation of materials, timeliness of their delivery to teaching staff, and centralised models of control. The Panel considers that it will be important for the College to pay close attention to the outcomes and recommendations of the formal review of the implementation of the academic programs that was conducted by the MoHE, OAC, and NZTEC in October 2008. The College is encouraged to ensure that it develops accountability and monitoring systems to guide progress on the action plan that has been developed to address these recommendations.

The Panel found that the College needs to pay more attention to policy development, management, dissemination, accessibility and implementation in areas related to staff development, student grievance and complaints, and several academic areas. Access to policies and procedures could be improved through the development of a college intranet/website and a communication systems in the College which is accessible to everyone, whether Arabic or English speaking.

The College has a strong commitment to developing an IT infrastructure to support the new academic programs. During the quality audit visit, the Panel observed the new IT laboratories and Education Technology Centre. The continued development of the administrative IT systems, including the Student Information System, will be important to support data collection and analysis for the College's nascent quality assurance system. Currently there is a significant lack of established data collection and analysis systems in the College which is an area that needs to be addressed.

The Panel found that the College was valued by the community and interviews confirmed active staff and student engagement in community activities.

Overall, the OAC believes that CAS Ibri is managing its transition to the College of Applied Science status well and there is much dedication and good will on the part of College management and staff, as well as MoHE personnel, to support the new teaching and learning mission. However, the College still has significant work to do to establish data capture and analysis systems to establish effective quality assurance systems for its key activities.

A summary of commendations, affirmations, and recommendations follows. As has already been mentioned, these are not prioritised by the Panel. Rather, they are listed below in the order which they appear in the Report.

### *Summary of Commendations*

A formal commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.



1. The Oman Accreditation Council commends the senior management of the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī for its leadership, commitment, and initiatives in the repositioning of the College in line with the strategic vision for the CAS network.....12
2. The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī on its staff and student engagement in community activities. ....29
3. The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī for its provision of IT facilities to support the academic programs.....32
4. The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī for its initiative in providing English language courses for administrative staff which will enable staff to operate more efficiently in the College.....40
5. The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī on its range of publications, for example, “The Ibrians”, and its external communication activities. ....43

**Summary of Affirmations**

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

1. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī’s initiative to establish the position of Assistant Dean for Student Affairs to separate the management of academic affairs from student affairs.....12
2. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī efforts to ensure that course packages are developed in a timely manner prior to subject offerings. ....18
3. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the efforts of the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī in moving to an external examiners system. ....21
4. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī’s efforts to include industry and community engagement in its yearly planning with a defined set of objectives. ....27
5. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī for its ongoing development of the College website as an important interface between College staff and students and the community.....32
6. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī move towards incorporating e-learning technology and its commitment to more extensive application of this as an educational tool. ....32
7. The Oman Accreditation Council agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī that the existing academic advising system needs to be improved and supports its efforts to more effectively and efficiently support the academic advising process. ....33
8. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī’s efforts in adapting its systems to meet the needs of the new profile of the College.....35
9. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the efforts of the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī (in conjunction with MoHE) to build additional residential halls for both male and female students and to ensure that the male student accommodation needs are catered for.....36
10. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibrī’s efforts to involve students in departmental committees and seek their views on College services including the provision of catering services.....37

11. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the efforts of the College of Applied Sciences Ibri to improve its approach to staff induction throughout the College.....40
12. The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri’s efforts to clearly define service areas’ roles and responsibilities to avoid overlaps. ....42

### ***Summary of Recommendations***

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

1. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri ensure that it has sufficient autonomy to develop academic ownership, initiative and greater independence in its financial management.....11
2. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri establish clear accountability and progress monitoring systems in the action plan to address the recommendations arising from the NZTEC program review and that a follow-up study be conducted to assess how effectively the outcomes and recommendations of the review have been implemented. ....13
3. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri strengthen its industry collaboration strategy in the areas of student engagement, knowledge transfer, alignment with business, and student employability in all aspects of the College’s operations. ....13
4. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop measurable performance indicators and targets for the Operational Plan and consider benchmarking these against similar Colleges in the Colleges of Applied Sciences network. ....14
5. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri consolidate its approved academic policies, and ensure their effective dissemination, accessibility and implementation. ....15
6. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop and implement effective student complaint and grievance policy and procedures, and provide information about this policy in the Student Handbook.....15
7. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri reconsider the strategic purposes and usefulness of the term “Centre of Excellence” and its potential impacts on those programs that do not attract that nomenclature. ....18
8. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop a consistent statement of expected graduate attributes, and that this be widely communicated to staff, students and potential employers.....18
9. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri involve teaching staff, regional industry and employer representatives in future course and program review mechanisms.....19
10. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri take immediate steps to address high staff workload in the Design and Communication Departments. ....19
11. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop a comprehensive, approved plagiarism policy which is communicated widely,

implemented and monitored to ensure consistency of handling of plagiarism cases across departments. ....	20
12. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri give priority to developing structures and systems to manage business and industry collaboration for student placement and supervision processes. ....	20
13. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop a comprehensive assessment policy which is widely disseminated and monitored to ensure consistent assessment practices across all academic departments. ....	21
14. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri resource initiatives to address the underperformance of male students. ....	22
15. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri build a research capability guided by a focused research and consultancy plan, consistent with the mission and vision of the College. ....	25
16. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri ensure appropriate resources to support the objectives of the research and consultancy plan. ....	25
17. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop comprehensive plans to integrate the requirements of academic departments within the College's annual plans so that effective academic support is provided. ....	30
18. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop and implement efficient and effective systems for the timely purchasing of books and learning materials and ensure that there are appropriate and sufficient library holdings for each program of study. ....	31
19. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the IT areas to support student learning at College of Applied Sciences Ibri, including computing laboratories, be equally accessible to all students. ....	32
20. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop systems to regularly collect, analyse and disseminate student feedback on all aspects of student learning and support services. ....	35
21. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop the capacity to deal directly with student disciplinary matters. ....	36
22. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri urgently develop a comprehensive academic staff development plan along with policy and procedures for the adequate provision of resources to support this plan. ....	40
23. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri strengthen the use of electronic communication in the information and communication systems to assist decision making and ensure timely information provision to the College community. ....	43
24. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri adopt a bilingual approach to all relevant communication and documentation to ensure that it is accessible to all staff and students. ....	44

## 1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

### 1.1 *The Audit Context*

CAS Ibri, and the five other Colleges of Applied Sciences, were established by Royal Degree 62/2007. The Colleges are under the jurisdiction of the MoHE. They evolved out of six Colleges of Education which were re-focussed due to an oversupply of qualified teachers and the need to produce graduates more aligned to industry needs. For CAS Ibri, the transition commenced with the first intake into the Foundation Program in 2005 and with an initial offering of four degree programs. At the time of the audit, CAS Ibri was nearing the conclusion of its third year of operation with the fourth year of its bachelor degrees still to be offered; hence the College had no graduates from these new programs.

The Panel commenced its audit of CAS Ibri, mindful that it was a College in transition and was continuing to face the challenges of the introductory phase of its core academic programs.

This was an important context for the Panel's consideration of governance and management issues as many of CAS Ibri's organisational structures and decision-making processes are continuing to evolve. There is a high level of centralized control by the MoHE over the roll-out of academic programs and other College developmental issues and the College has not yet reached a steady state in terms of its student or staff profile. The Panel found that the management focus is necessarily on the urgent issues associated with the roll-out of the academic programs rather than on longer-term planning issues that might be expected of an institution that has reached a steady state of development.

The evolutionary nature of the governance and management arrangements reflect this point-in-time circumstance of the College. They are likely to continue to evolve, at least, until the first cycle of offerings of the academic programs has been completed. The observations, commendations, affirmations and recommendations in this chapter of the Report reflect the transitional and evolutionary character of the College at this time.

### 1.2 *Mission, Vision and Values*

The CAS network has common, clearly presented, statements of the mission, vision and values which will guide CAS Ibri into the future. The CAS mission states:

*“Our responsibilities are the transfer and creation of current knowledge through cooperation, practical orientation and intensive collaboration with our students, communities and businesses which will provide the foundation that will underpin Oman's development and its integration in the global economy” (Portfolio, p.24)*

The mission to *create* current knowledge signals the intention to develop an explicit research agenda, albeit of a practical and applied nature. Furthermore, developing links to communities and business as a vehicle for delivering the educational services to students is an appropriate goal for an applied higher education institution. Both these aspects of the mission are explored in greater depth in later sections of this Report.

### 1.3 *Governance*

All six Colleges of Applied Sciences are governed by the Minister of Higher Education, a single Board of Trustees (BoT), and a single Academic Council (Portfolio, p.2). The BoT has a wide range of academic and financial authorities (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel found that the central roles of the BoT and the Academic Council have been clearly articulated by Ministerial Orders.

A new College Charter and a significant number of bylaws are under active consideration by the MoHE. These will further assist the College in major aspects of its operations (Portfolio, p.31). CAS Ibri has a College Council to consider academic matters arising from its academic departments or from the Director General of CAS and central committees (Portfolio, p.27).

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between MoHE and NZTEC provides the Colleges in the CAS network with curriculum, associated teaching and course implementation advice. The MoHE determines organisational structures and responsibilities across all Colleges, a centrally driven process for the roll-out of the four CAS Ibri academic programs, and centralised control over recruitment of staff and other key resource issues. Now that the programs are nearly fully implemented, the sustainability of these centrally driven arrangements should be reconsidered to a model which facilitates greater levels of autonomy, discretion and flexibility at the College level.

A formal review of the implementation of the NZTEC academic programs in all the Colleges in the CAS network was conducted in October, 2008 by the MoHE, OAC, and NZTEC. Heads of Departments at CAS Ibri collaborated with the review team; this model of cooperation is a good example of a move towards a more shared and consultative approach to the management of academic programs. There is great scope for this to be extended, particularly once the first offering of the four programs has been achieved, in order to facilitate greater levels of ownership of the programs at the local level, and greater levels of industry collaboration. Other key areas where greater levels of autonomy might be contemplated include financial management, staffing policies and procedures, research and professional development policies and practices. It might be particularly helpful for the development of the College in coming years if financial incentives were incorporated into future funding models. These could possibly encourage the College to seek alternative sources of funding for College operations, the surpluses from which might be directed to enhance College facilities and infrastructure.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri ensure that it has sufficient autonomy to develop academic ownership, initiative and greater independence in its financial management.**

#### **1.4 Management**

The Director General of the CAS is the Chief Executive Officer for the six Colleges in the CAS network, and assumes responsibility for academic and administrative affairs across all the Colleges. Each College in the CAS network is headed by a Dean who supervises the College's academic, administrative and financial affairs and reports to the Director General regarding implementation at College level. The College processes all academic, administrative and financial matters requiring MoHE approval through the Director General's Office.

In supervising the academic, administrative and financial affairs of the College, the Dean is assisted by an Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, a Director of Administrative and Financial Affairs, a Head of Students Affairs, a Head of Admissions and Registration, and a Head of Learning Resource Centre (Portfolio, p.28).

The Panel was impressed with the dedicated way in which the leadership of the College at various levels has accepted the challenges associated with transforming a College of Education into a College of Applied Science and managed the progressive introductory phase of new academic programs successfully. During the audit, staff referred to the College's progressive development within the CAS network and shared openly with the Panel the successes and challenges they have experienced to date with this process. The Panel formed the view that the leadership of the College can maintain this momentum in the period ahead.

### Commendation 1

**The Oman Accreditation Council commends the senior management of the College of Applied Sciences Ibri for its leadership, commitment, and initiatives in the repositioning of the College in line with the strategic vision for the CAS network.**

The process of transforming the College and implementing a raft of new programs in that context is intensely demanding on the College leadership team. As student numbers have grown, now in excess of 1400, so too have the complexity and scope of responsibilities associated with the introduction of each new level of the curriculum in each program. The Panel identified two significant issues arising from the College's response to this growth. Firstly, a number of senior positions at the College were being filled on an "acting" basis and the MoHE has been taking time to process the request to establish a new leadership position of Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at the College. Secondly, staff shortages meant that some departments could not sustain a monthly meeting schedule. At the time of the audit visit, for example, there was only a small number of academic staff appointed to the Communication Department and teaching loads were correspondingly very onerous.

Whilst some of the "acting" positions mentioned in the Portfolio had been filled by the time of the audit visit, the Panel would like to reinforce the importance of timely appointments to assist the senior management in progressing the Colleges' growth agenda. Equally, it is clear that where circumstances make it impractical for monthly staff meetings to be held, alternate communication strategies need to be deployed as a substitute.

With respect to the new position of Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, the College's development has reached a stage in scale and complexity that warrants this appointment. Such an initiative would enhance the ability of the College to progress the policy framework for student matters and the pastoral care of student more broadly. It would also ensure that the current Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs was better able to attend to the ever-widening aspects of academic and program management that reflect the expanding academic profile of the College. Both appointments would enhance the support available to the College Dean during this initial growth phase of development.

### Affirmation 1

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri's initiative to establish the position of Assistant Dean for Student Affairs to separate the management of academic affairs from student affairs.**

#### 1.5 *Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance*

As previously indicated, the Colleges in the CAS network are affiliated at system level with NZTEC. The MoU with the MoHE designates that NZTEC is responsible for course curriculum, the provision of teaching and learning resources, and aspects of quality assurance for all Colleges in the system. MoHE Program Directors coordinate with the appropriate NZTEC staff (Program Coordinators) for each academic discipline regarding the content and material for the programs and oversee the program implementation at each College in the CAS network. The Panel spoke with NZTEC Program Coordinators, interviewed MoHE Program Directors and CAS Ibri management and academic staff, and read the relevant NZTEC Program Coordinator's reports of their visit to CAS Ibri. Furthermore, a formal review (October, 2008) was conducted by the MoHE, OAC, and NZTEC, of the implementation of the academic programs from the NZTEC affiliation in the CAS network. The Panel noted the comprehensiveness of the review report and the associated action plan for the Colleges in the CAS network. Whilst the magnitude of the challenge confronting the MoU parties is apparent from the report, the success of the program

implementation to date provides a positive reflection on the MoHE and the College staff particularly. However, it is essential that appropriate follow-up occurs between the MoHE and the College and within the College itself to follow through on the recommendations in the review related to the programs delivered at CAS Ibri, and identify officers with specific responsibility for implementing these areas of the action plan.

### **Recommendation 2**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri establish clear accountability and progress monitoring systems in the action plan to address the recommendations arising from the NZTEC program review and that a follow-up study be conducted to assess how effectively the outcomes and recommendations of the review have been implemented.**

#### **1.6 Strategic and Operational Planning**

All Colleges in the CAS network are guided by a single Strategic Plan (2008-2013) which was approved by the Academic Council. CAS Ibri has developed an Operational Plan (January 2009 version) aligned with the overall system Strategic Plan. The Operational Plan is developed from the collection of operational plans of the various academic and non-academic departments (Portfolio, p.31).

During the course of the audit, the Panel had the benefit of being able to review both the CAS network Strategic Plan and the associated CAS Ibri Operational Plan. These plans provide important points of reference to evaluate progress against the ten Strategic Goals that the plans identify. CAS Ibri Operational Plan provided the Panel with clarity on the College's sense of priorities, strategies and implementation tasks that it was pursuing.

Different elements of these plans are at different stages of implementation. For example, the College is well advanced on *Strategic Goal 1: Attract the Most Appropriate Students* and *Strategic Goal 2: Provide High Quality Education*, but has progressed little on *Strategic Goal 5: Transfer and Generate Knowledge*. It has achieved significant progress on *Strategic Goal 4: Provide a Positive and Supportive Environment*, but very little in *Strategic Goal 10: Attain Accreditation and International Standards*.

The Panel agrees that the breadth and scope of the Strategic Goals are comprehensive as they reflect on the key elements that the CAS should aspire to achieve. However, there are two areas of the CAS Ibri Operational Plan that require revision and further development.

Firstly, industry collaboration will be a critical characteristic of any successful College of Applied Sciences. Crucial to this success will be: the way in which College curricula relate and connect with relevant industries; how the views of industry partners are embraced in the on-going review and improvement of curricula and in guest lecturing and tutoring; the engagement of students in industry-relevant experience; and the involvement of internship/studentship placement in industry settings as integral elements of the curriculum. The extent of the College's successful deployment of its objectives will also be determined by the judgments made by industry about the work-readiness of College graduates and the contribution College academic staff are able to make to industry training, applied research and the downstream transfer of knowledge. In the Panel's assessment of the Operational Plan, the lack of appropriate industry strategies is an opportunity for improvement that needs to be addressed.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri strengthen its industry collaboration strategy in the areas of**

**student engagement, knowledge transfer, alignment with business, and student employability in all aspects of the College's operations.**

Secondly, the College Operational Plan does not contain numerical measurements that encourage collection of defined statistics, comparisons with measurable expectations, progress against specific targets or benchmarking with similar institutions (whether in the CAS network or elsewhere). This makes it difficult for the College to measure the achievement of its goals. While it is still early in the College's history and development, it is important to develop a culture of performance transparency in planning and reporting that fosters measurable accountability to the College community, to the MoHE and, ultimately, to the nation. A revised version of the CAS Ibri Operational Plan should seek to build on the current version with much more clearly articulated targets. It should also begin to focus on those other Colleges within the CAS network that it would seek to benchmark performance against. A further development of this culture would see CAS Ibri look to benchmark beyond CAS Network and/or partners beyond Oman with which it can share performance measures and best practice.

**Recommendation 4**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop measurable performance indicators and targets for the Operational Plan and consider benchmarking these against similar Colleges in the Colleges of Applied Sciences network.**

**1.7 Financial Management**

CAS Ibri follows the Ministry of Finance (MoF) financial system and drafts an annual budget accordingly. It is acknowledged that with the differing program and activity requirements of the College, there is an urgent need to reassess the funding allocations and budget category specifications. This is especially true for the new specialization areas requiring equipment and staff training. There are also funding delays caused by the different timings of the financial and the academic year (Portfolio, p.31). Although requested, the Panel was not able to view the 2008 correspondence between MoHE and MoF regarding budget increases. Interviews with MoHE personnel and College staff, as well as the Panel's observations, confirmed the need for differing levels of resourcing of areas of CAS Ibri's activities, and more streamlined and timely procedures for dealing with requests for resources. Recommendations regarding appropriate resourcing of specific activities and initiatives are included in later sections of this Report (see Recommendation 16).

**1.8 Risk Management**

The centralized MoHE and MoF control of the Colleges in the CAS network mitigate significant financial risk exposure at CAS Ibri as disbursement to the College is regulated and there is little discretionary funding. The Panel was provided with a draft Risk Management Plan covering non-financial areas. The intention of CAS Ibri is to implement the plan in parallel with the 5-year Strategic Plan. The Panel supports this initiative.

**1.9 Policy Management**

The Panel reviewed the previous bylaws, regulations and courses of the College, reflecting the College's bylaws and programs when it was operating as a College of Education, and a copy of the draft Quality Assurance Management System Manual. This Manual is in English, and contains a comprehensive set of institutional policy areas, many currently under development, which will be implemented across the new CAS network. The Panel was presented with evidence at various times of the implementation of different academic policies, but it was not clear that all staff or students were aware of their existence, where they might access them readily, or knew how to be able to refer to them quickly as a guide to action when required. The



Panel concluded that the College is clearly in a state of transition in policy development and implementation and in establishing the attendant policy management systems.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri consolidate its approved academic policies, and ensure their effective dissemination, accessibility and implementation.**

Section 9.3 of this Report discusses the importance of the development of bilingual forms of key College documents and makes recommendations in that area.

#### ***1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems***

Within the CAS network, the responsibility for faculties and academic department reviews rests with the BoT. The MoU between the MoHE and NZTEC includes a schedule of reviews of the staged implementation of the new academic programs. The Panel found evidence that this review schedule is being implemented. As previously discussed, the major program review conducted in October 2008 by NZTEC, MoHE and OAC and the implications for CAS Ibri of the outcomes of that review have already been addressed earlier in this Report (see section 1.5).

#### ***1.11 Student Grievance Process***

The CAS Ibri Portfolio provided information about the way in which the College is managing student grievances on grades (p.33), and complaints (p.64). Panel interviews confirmed that there is a lack of specificity and transparency about both the entitlement to lodge a grievance and also about the process through which grievances will be dealt with. Grievance processes are handled on an ad hoc basis and the informality that currently prevails in this area will not serve the College and its students well. The College needs to clarify the processes for dealing with student complaints about grades; student grievances; and complaints from students about matters they find unsatisfactory. The roles and responsibilities of the complainant, individual lecturers, Heads of Department, Assistant Deans, the Student Council, College Council and (to the extent it may be relevant) the MoHE should be clearly outlined and published in the Student Handbook. These roles and responsibilities should also be available online so that they can be readily accessed by the entire College community.

### **Recommendation 6**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop and implement effective student complaint and grievance policy and procedures, and provide information about this policy in the Student Handbook.**

#### ***1.12 Health and Safety***

A number of initiatives have been taken by the leadership of the College in this area. Although the College has not recruited a dedicated health and safety advisor, a Health and Safety Committee has been established to ensure that the College provides a safe physical environment for its staff and students. In general, the activity of the Committee seems to reflect positively on this important aspect of campus management. The Panel agrees with the College's initiative to develop and implement health and safety training programs. However, during the audit visit, Panel members observed an absence of adequate bilingual signage in corridors and buildings regarding critical health and safety messages. Recommendations regarding bilingual communications are addressed in section 9.3 of this Report.

**1.13 Oversight of Associated Entities**

CAS Ibri has no oversight of associated entities, so this section is not relevant to this Report.

## 2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

The CAS network Strategic Plan, Strategic Goal 2 is to:

*“Provide high quality education” (Strategic Plan, p.11)*

The CAS Ibri Operational Plan provides the following background statement to provide context to the objectives developed by the College to deliver that Strategic Goal:

*“The driving force behind the conversion from Education to Applied Sciences is the quest for modern quality programmes able to respond to the meet the emerging [sic] needs of the knowledge-based economy. Such programmes, in addition to boosting the competitiveness and employability of our graduates, are expected to become the catalysts of economic growth in Oman. This goal will be achieved through a rigorous process of programme evaluation and selection and continuous professional development” (Operational Plan, p.1)*

The curriculum and associated teaching and learning resources for the CAS network were developed by NZTEC in liaison with MoHE personnel. CAS Ibri initially offered 4 programs: Bachelor of International Business; Bachelor of Communication Studies; Bachelor of Information Technology; and Bachelor of Design (Portfolio, p.8).

Due to the centralised nature of curriculum design process, CAS Ibri has chosen to focus this section of the Portfolio, not on an evaluation of the methods of teaching or the content of the academic programs, but on the aspects of the teaching and learning process over which the College has control (Portfolio, p.35).

### 2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives

The CAS network Strategic Goal 7 is:

*“Establish centres of excellence.” (Strategic Plan, p.10)*

The Panel encountered some difficulties with consistency of use, and potential impact, of the term “Centre of Excellence” amongst staff who were interviewed, and who seemed to have widely differing understandings of its intended strategic intention and operational deployment. Both the “Competence Underpinned by Knowledge” Report and the NZTEC Program Review Report provided as supplementary materials, have drawn attention to similar difficulties.

There appeared to be some confusion at the College in relation to whether the term “Centre of Excellence” was taken to mean a “centre for specialisation”, where certain selected disciplines were taught to full degree level, or a “Centre of Excellence” for a particular discipline, where outstanding and externally recognised staff and facilities would be provided with additional resources and research support.

There also appeared to be some potential for programs being run in Colleges that were not “Centres for Excellence” to have a less than excellent connotation, although this would not apply to centres for specialisation. In the long term, this may have potentially undesirable effects on staff and student perceptions of program value, and consequently issues for staff recruitment and student demand.

### **Recommendation 7**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri reconsider the strategic purposes and usefulness of the term “Centre of Excellence” and its potential impacts on those programs that do not attract that nomenclature.**

CAS Ibri makes reference to graduate attributes (Portfolio, p.35) but they have not been clearly stated. While specific learning objectives are embedded at individual course level, the Panel was unable to find evidence that staff were broadly aware of or had agreed upon intended generic graduate attributes or how these could be monitored across the entire degree program. Various attributes such as creativity, communication skills (including English proficiency), leadership, and information literacy were highlighted at different times.

Given that a whole program cycle has yet to be completed, awareness of and monitoring of graduate attributes at this stage of each program is especially important, and will no doubt be a vital component of the completed program reviews when these occur. Some mapping of graduate attributes to show where they appear in the whole degree curriculum may be desirable. Clear delineation and evidence of graduate attributes may also effectively contribute to the support of graduate employability.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop a consistent statement of expected graduate attributes, and that this be widely communicated to staff, students and potential employers.**

## **2.2 Curriculum**

As previously indicated, the curriculum for CAS network programs was designed by NZTEC under an agreement with the MoHE. While the programs are yet to reach the final year of implementation, much has been creditably achieved in a constrained time frame and there have been distinct benefits from importing an externally recognized curriculum with benchmarking potential. However, it was clear to the Panel that the process has also produced a number of challenges.

Amongst the most important of those were: the need to make culturally and geographically appropriate adaptations; the need to ensure timely and consistent delivery of materials throughout the program for use by staff at CAS Ibri; and the need to involve the teachers in providing feedback and in the review of the imported curriculum and course structure. Initially, this process took longer than intended.

The College indicates that some course materials are adapted and some are straight adoptions from the New Zealand consortium, and the curriculum is communicated to the College on a weekly basis (Portfolio, p.41). Whilst action is being taken by College management and the Program Directors at the MoHE to adapt materials in a more timely manner, this “just in time” provision of curriculum is unsuitable and the Panel found it to be a major issue for some teaching staff with the potential to affect the quality of program delivery to students.

### **Affirmation 2**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri efforts to ensure that course packages are developed in a timely manner prior to subject offerings.**

The importation of an externally recognised curriculum, with the potential for benchmarking and meeting external academic standards, has enabled the CAS network to commence program delivery in a timely manner. However, the Panel was provided with convincing and persuasive arguments of the importance of involving local staff and considering regional interests in any review of the existing curriculum, and its future re-design delivery, assessment and outcome standards.

It was the Panel's view that local ownership of, and commitment to, the curriculum is paramount to the quality of delivery and the regional employability of graduate outcomes. The involvement of relevant local teaching staff and regional industry and employer representation could substantially add to the future perceived value of the courses offered at the College.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri involve teaching staff, regional industry and employer representatives in future course and program review mechanisms.**

### **2.3 Student Entry Standards**

The Higher Education Admission Centre administers the admissions process for all the Colleges in the CAS network (Portfolio, p.38). Students are required to undertake a preparatory Foundation Program to improve their English along with basic computer and numeracy skills. During interviews, the Panel determined that the College was aware of the requirements of new national standards for General Foundation Programs and was progressing towards implementing the required program changes.

Students are given an English Placement Test on commencing the Foundation Program and streamed according to their results. The Panel heard concerns as to whether students streamed into Strand C, the lowest entry level, were able to meet the English standards required to enter the degree program. Many of the students in this strand were male. Students who were unsuccessful in the Foundation Program were provided with the opportunity to pursue additional studies for two semesters outside the College whilst their place was held. This option could prove to be costly for students and the Panel saw no evidence that it was an option that could be used to improve the level of English of students. It would be prudent for the College to review this practice and explore alternative pathways which provide more successful outcomes for these students.

### **2.4 Teaching Quality**

CAS Ibri referred to "hidden teaching workloads" (Portfolio p.29), and made reference to workforce challenges, for example "the shortage of teaching staff"; "class sizes in some departments exceed the permitted ratios"; "the faculty shortage", "shortage of faculty and resources"; and "relatively large student/teacher ratios" (Portfolio, pp.40-44).

While it is always difficult to assess appropriate dimensions of acceptable workload in different discipline areas, the Panel formed the view that, taking into account the additional responsibilities such as program and course advising, the current staffing levels in Design and Communication create challenges for teaching quality in those discipline areas.

### **Recommendation 10**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri take immediate steps to address high staff workload in the Design and Communication Departments.**

Student evaluations of teaching have been reinstated at the College in the second semester of 2008, having previously been discontinued for several years (Portfolio, p.41). The College acknowledges that this is a centrally managed MoHE process. Interviews with staff confirmed inconsistent use of evaluations, the transition to the use of evaluations on Blackboard and lack of consistency provision of feedback to individual staff. A robust online student evaluation system with feedback to staff and links to the staff performance appraisal system would enhance the quality of the College's teaching.

## 2.5 *Plagiarism*

The Panel heard evidence that the issue of plagiarism had been broadly recognized and acknowledged at CAS Ibri to be a major challenge as in any modern university setting, and that the College was committed to ensuring that staff and students were made aware of their responsibilities in relation to academic honesty and promoting academic integrity.

However, the College (Portfolio, p.42) and the evidence presented to the Panel suggested that more could be done in this area to ensure both procedural fairness and consistency of application across all discipline areas by College academic staff. Specifically, the College needs to pay attention to developing a written, approved, comprehensive policy on academic honesty which incorporates appropriate definitions (including definitions of academic misconduct, plagiarism, collusion, cheating and fraud), and which prescribes appropriate actions and processes.

### **Recommendation 11**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop a comprehensive, approved plagiarism policy which is communicated widely, implemented and monitored to ensure consistency of handling of plagiarism cases across departments.**

## 2.6 *Student Placements*

The College acknowledges that the placement of prospective graduates is important (Portfolio, p.42). The centralized nature of the CAS model means that the MoHE has responsibility for this aspect of the College's activities through the membership of the BoT; the nascent Program Advisory Committees and the recently appointed Program Director who oversees private sector liaison.

The Panel was informed about delays in resourcing Career Guidance Officers positions in the Colleges. This delay meant these positions were only recently filled and were now "catching up" with their own training, developing industry contacts, and establishing systems and structures for student placements and compulsory internships. The Panel formed the view that this aspect of the College activity is a priority given students are now entering the final year of their programs.

### **Recommendation 12**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri give priority to developing structures and systems to manage business and industry collaboration for student placement and supervision processes.**

## 2.7 *Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation*

CAS Ibri makes a statement of support for the diversification of assessment methods (Portfolio, p.42), but the evidence provided to the Panel suggested that in the face of time and resource constraints, assessment processes rely extensively on the use of examinations. There was also

some evidence of inconsistency in the methods of monitoring grade distributions and failure rates across different disciplines, and the resulting actions.

Assessment processes and outcomes were understandably of concern to some students, and consistent assessment practices could be greatly assisted by a comprehensive assessment policy. It is the Panel's view that assessment of student work is a mechanism for assuring the attainment of desirable academic standards as well as enhancing the quality of student learning through feedback that is clear, informative, constructive and relevant to the needs of the learner.

### **Recommendation 13**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop a comprehensive assessment policy which is widely disseminated and monitored to ensure consistent assessment practices across all academic departments.**

The College claims to be committed to ensuring effective moderation practices in assessment (Portfolio, p.44), including the establishment, at the MoHE level, of an Examiners Committee. Elsewhere in the Portfolio, the College suggests a possible improvement through the introduction of a cross-institutional external examiner system "to ensure that standards are comparable with those embraced in similar institutions worldwide" (Portfolio, p.37). The Panel found evidence that this move was supported by the MoHE in the context of benchmarking standards and marking and moderation both nationally and internationally. Several committees were actively pursuing this agenda.

### **Affirmation 3**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the efforts of the College of Applied Sciences Ibri in moving to an external examiners system.**

## **2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation**

CAS Ibri claims it enforces MoHE regulations regarding examination materials and invigilation systems (Portfolio, p.44). Examinations are either prepared or endorsed centrally and dispatched to the Colleges in the CAS network. Academic staff enter grades, and systems exist to check the integrity of entered marks. The Panel formed an overall view that a robust system of examination security at the College was in place to ensure integrity of the process.

## **2.9 Student Retention and Progression**

CAS Ibri indicated that male students comprised approximately 26% of the overall student population of 1481 total in 2008 (Portfolio, p.9). Data and statements indicating comparatively poor retention rates and overall performance of these male students which appear at various places in the Portfolio caused the Panel concern. It was evident from further analysis of the data available that the withdrawal rate for male students was considerably higher than for female students and that the proportion of male students declines substantially both overall and in relation to female students over the years of study.

At the time of the audit, the Panel requested current data on students who were considered to be "at risk of failure" or on probation. The data provided showed that 124 students were then on probation, 13 of them female, indicating that almost 90% of the students on probation were male, in a situation where male students comprise only about a quarter of the overall student population.

The Panel was greatly concerned with what appeared to be comparatively poor retention rates and overall achievement by male students at the College. It is clear in the Portfolio (p.46) that the

College has begun to analyse some of the contributory reasons for this imbalanced situation. The Panel considers that this issue is of major and immediate importance for the institution to address.

**Recommendation 14**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri resource initiatives to address the underperformance of male students.**

***2.10 Graduate Destinations and Employability***

CAS Ibri will have the first graduates for the new programs in 2010 and therefore as such there is no graduate data presented by the College in its Portfolio. The Panel considers the recently appointed Career Guidance Officer has a key role in preparing students to be work ready and also developing industries and business linkages to assist graduates in securing employment.



### **3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMS**

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

#### 4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

The CAS Ibri mission statement emphasises responsibility for the:

*“..transfer and creation of current knowledge.”(Portfolio, p.24)*

Accordingly, the CAS Strategic Plan (2008-2013) includes the following objective with respect to transferring and generation knowledge:

*“Objective 5.2: Establish a research and development framework (R&D F)”  
(Strategic Plan, p.13)*

The associated strategies to achieve this objective include the following:

*Strategy 5.2.A: Appoint Research Chairs and Research Fellows.*

*Strategy 5.2.B: Attract public and private funding and financial support.*

*Strategy 5.2.C: Appoint research assistants among students to improve their research skills.*

*Strategy 5.2.D: Equip College with up-to-date research facilities” (Strategic Plan, p.13)*

The Panel was advised that the focus of all the Colleges in the CAS network is on applied research which is of relevance to the community.

##### 4.1 Research Planning and Management

The emphasis on the “creation of knowledge” in the mission statement commits CAS Ibri to developing an institutional research culture where academic understanding can be further enhanced, new conceptual ideas can be created, and planned research outcomes can be delivered. Given that CAS Ibri was established in 2005, it is reasonable to expect that it is only in the early stages of such development.

While the Academic Council is responsible for strategic policy decisions regarding academic and research activities, the research management framework within CAS Ibri appears to consist of the newly constituted Research Committee. The Committee includes members from the various academic departments but the role and responsibilities of this Committee are yet to be clearly articulated.

Although the Panel was informed that proposals for establishing a specialised academic journal and a research map were being considered by the Academic Council, the Panel was provided with little evidence of any specific development or support of research activity within the institution. The Strategic and Operational Plans lack clear, objective targets against which research achievements can be measured. Clearly, although the importance of building a research culture has been recognized, there is a lack of clarity of how an appropriate research capability will be built. There is also a lack of clarity of how the research objectives and strategy are linked to the “Centre of Excellence” concept and the proposed appointment of research chairs and fellows.

The Panel noted the lack of focused research goals and a research plan against which activities could be measured, and which would allow the achievement of outcomes in accordance with the stated objectives. The development of these goals is important, particularly given the early stages of research development. The Panel also noted an apparent lack of prioritisation for research and scholarly activities with some staff members, and it was evident that the staff awareness of research and their involvement in research needed to be substantially enhanced if the mission

statement is to be seriously addressed. The Panel concluded that there is an urgent need to develop and implement a coherent research plan focused on initiating, developing and sustaining research performance across the institution, including support and training for new researchers, and ensuring that adequate support is in place to support sustained research activities.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri build a research capability guided by a focused research and consultancy plan, consistent with the mission and vision of the College.**

The Panel was informed that the perceived main reasons for the lack of research activities included substantial teaching loads and lack of financial support and appropriate resources. However the Panel also noted that teaching staff with lower teaching loads were not always involved in research activities. The evidence revealed a lack of institutional awareness of staff needs with regard to research training, and a lack of appropriate systematic support and motivation to engage in research. The Panel was informed of one instance where an academic staff member was provided financial support to attend a conference in a stated year while the applications of others had been declined, and reasons for the decisions were not clear to the staff involved. Furthermore, the Panel found that although access to online journals was available, the library did not house academic research journals and the library holdings for the various disciplines were very limited. The Panel was informed that the existing library resources could not adequately support research activities. The Panel concluded that it is critical for CAS Ibri to ensure that research activities are actively supported with a consistently applied research and financial policy and to provide the required resources necessary to foster an institutional research culture and infrastructure.

#### **Recommendation 16**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri ensure appropriate resources to support the objectives of the research and consultancy plan.**

#### **4.2 *Research Performance***

This section was not included in the CAS Ibri Portfolio and CAS Ibri did not provide any documented evidence of research activities undertaken by staff in the last three years.

#### **4.3 *Research Funding Schemes***

This section was not included in the CAS Ibri Portfolio. The Panel was informed that it would be difficult for CAS Ibri as a public institution to obtain research funding from sources other than the MoF which funds its activities. There was a view that according to the existing requirements, CAS Ibri could not retain any funding or income from any outside source other than the MoF.

#### **4.4 *Consultancy Activities***

This section was not included in the CAS Ibri Portfolio. CAS Ibri did not provide any evidence of consultancies undertaken by staff in the last three years. However, the Panel was informed that there have been requests from some of the ministries and companies in Ibri for training and consultancy services.

#### **4.5 *Ethics and Biosafety***

This area was not included in the Portfolio and not investigated by the Panel.

#### **4.6 *Intellectual Property***

This area was not included in the Portfolio and not investigated by the Panel.

#### **4.7 *Professional Development for Research***

This section was not included in the CAS Ibri Portfolio. However, given the fact that CAS Ibri is in the process of trying to develop a research environment and given the current lack of evidence concerning sustained research initiatives, it would be worthwhile to prepare a comprehensive research training and research development plan (see Recommendation 15) to ensure that staff development needs are adequately supported, and the institutional mission goals are addressed.

#### **4.8 *Research Teaching Nexus***

CAS Ibri did not refer to the Research-Teaching nexus in its Portfolio, and the evidence provided in Panel interviews suggested that this was an area that had not received institutional prioritization, but had been left up to the initiative of individual staff. Given the need to develop an active research culture, the links between research, scholarship and teaching appear to be a priority for institutional attention and planning. Few staff provided evidence of how the research-teaching nexus was planned or applied in their courses, and how scholarly activities informed their teaching, apart from a good example of a set of local case studies developed for the International Business Administration program. There were some indications from academic staff that subject coordinators incorporate current research knowledge in their subject domains into the relevant teaching materials. The Panel therefore concluded that the research-teaching nexus was an area that has been left largely to the discretion and direction of individual academic staff within the institution and has not been effectively considered as an institutional priority.

## 5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### 5.1 *Industry and Community Engagement Planning and Management*

Throughout its consideration of CAS Ibri Portfolio, the Panel paid particular attention to the “applied” nature of the College’s mission, vision and values. Explicit in these statements is the expectation that the College will make an enduring contribution to the economic development of Omani society on a range of dimensions, including:

*“The transfer and creation of current knowledge through cooperation with ... communities and businesses”* [mission]

*“The advancement of civilisation in a knowledge society”* [vision];

*“Needs-driven: to ensure alignment with business and student employability”* [values] (*Portfolio, pp.24-25*)

CAS Ibri gives effect to these aspirations, through the Operational Plan’s *Strategic Goals 5: Transfer and Generate Knowledge* and *Strategic Goal 9: Support and Enhance Community Engagement*. The objectives in the Operational Plan which expand on these strategies point to the multifaceted nature of the challenge that confronts the College in this area during its early, formative years. Specifically, the College has identified the importance of the place of industry collaboration and community engagement in its initial thoughts on research and consultancy planning, teaching and learning and the wider inter-relationships with its local and regional communities. With respect to industry collaboration this is reflected in the recent establishment of a Student Career Guidance Office (CGO) to support the efforts of the BoT; recognising the need to establish a formal mechanism or board to advise on industry placements for students, internships for prospective graduates and curriculum development, and the future provision of tailored industry training programs.

In the area of community engagement, the College has recognised the need to develop community outreach programs, establish continuing education centres, form an Alumni Association, build a range of community-oriented programs and improve access to the College’s facilities.

Whilst the current focus of the College’s staff and resources is necessarily devoted to the continuing roll-out of its four new programs, the Panel was encouraged by evidence of some advanced thinking in the area of industry and community engagement and preliminary steps had been taken towards direct industry and community engagement at both academic and student service levels. The timeliness of this strategic thinking and some early initiatives should not be underestimated. For example, the work of the CGO over the coming year will be critical as the College prepares the first cohort of students for graduation and prospective employment.

#### **Affirmation 4**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri’s efforts to include industry and community engagement in its yearly planning with a defined set of objectives.**

The Panel notes the explicit timelines that have been articulated for a number of strategic initiatives in the CAS Ibri Operational Plan under *Strategic Goal 9*. It will be important not only for these timelines to be achieved but that the BoT, College Dean and leadership team also monitor the effectiveness of these steps in meeting the overall aspirations of the College community and its regional support base. The Panel encourages the College to implement and regularly review initiatives and targeted outcomes for industry collaboration.

## **5.2 Relationship with Industry and Employers**

When the College offered only Education programs, the relationship with industry and employers was limited to the Ministry of Education and the College. At the time, the Dhahirah Directorate of Education Committee planned student practicum placements (Portfolio, p.49). CAS Ibri indicates the intention of the MoHE to undertake:

*“a more coherent, systematic and multifaceted agenda for collaboration and consultation with industries.” (Portfolio, p.49)*

CAS Ibri intends to engage local industries by exploring the potential for representation (observer status) on the College Council and reciprocal arrangements for College staff on industry boards (Portfolio, p.49). It will be critical for the College leadership to maintain the momentum in this area as the final year of the curriculum is introduced and students enter their final phase of study. For these students, the timely introduction of initiatives such as internship placements in industry and facilitating their access to prospective employment opportunities will be crucial. For the College, industry input into program development will help to ensure graduate employability (see Recommendation 3).

## **5.3 Relationships with Professions**

The relationship with professions is currently handled through the Program Directors at MoHE level.

## **5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers**

The MoHE is a member of the Association of the Gulf Cooperation Council Universities and has a cooperation agreement with the University of Al-Akhawayn in the Kingdom of Morocco (Portfolio, p.50). Once the full four years of the curriculum have been introduced and staffing and infrastructure profiles consolidated, the Panel encourages CAS Ibri to further benefit from these relationships and develop its own relationships with similar institutions offshore by promote regional and international cooperation and benchmarking activities.

## **5.5 Relationships with Alumni**

The College does not have an established Alumni Association. However, there are plans to have an Association operational for the first batch of CAS graduates in 2011 (Portfolio, p.51). The Panel encourages the College to maintain this timeline, as there is likely to be a strong desire among students to maintain their connection with the College through the Alumni Association. The College would benefit from such relationship using feedback from feedback from alumni in program development and review.

## **5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large**

The Panel noted the wide range of socio-cultural and humanitarian activities undertaken by staff and students alike throughout the Dhahirah community. These are exemplified by College interaction with the Scouts and Guides movement, through interactions with the local hospital in the provision of blood donations and the engagement of staff on community committees. During the audit visit, it also became apparent that the College was facilitating the conduct of public lectures on a range of topics to broaden the educational experience of students. On the evidence presented by the College in its Portfolio, the level of these activities on the part of students is expanding. There is clearly a desire on the part of the College management to embed these activities in the culture of the College thereby facilitating strong and sustainable relationships with the community at a level which goes well beyond the scope of these activities when the College was offering only programs in Education. This wider focus will complement the work of

the MoHE and Program Directors in their engagement with relevant professions and the Omani Chamber of Commerce.

**Commendation 2**

**The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibri on its staff and student engagement in community activities.**

## 6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The following institutional goals and objectives pertain to this area of the CAS Ibri's work:

- *Strategic Goal 2 : Provide High Quality Education*
  - *Objective 2.3 Improve student learning skills*
- *Strategic Goal 4 : Provide a Positive and Supportive Environment*
  - *Objective 4.1 Establish supportive management systems*  
[in the context of strategies for academic advising system management]
- *Strategic Goal 6 Reinforce the CAS infrastructure*
  - *Objective 6.1 Provide high quality up-to-date learning resources*  
[in the context of strategies for library, laboratories IT facilities and e-learning facilities] (*Strategic Plan*)

CAS Ibri has detailed strategies and implementation tasks in the Operational Plan to ensure the College meets these goals and objectives.

### 6.1 Academic Support Services Planning and Management

The CAS Operational Plan *Strategic Goal 6: Reinforce CAS Infrastructure* is accompanied by the following background statement:

*“Most of the equipments [sic] inherited from the Colleges of Education are not appropriate for the Applied Sciences, and those relevant are already outdated. We believe that addressing this issue in a timely manner is essential for the successful delivery of the curricula and the creation of a positive environment among the students and staff alike. Providing the right infrastructure will allow the students to get the right training, which, in turn, will positively affect their employability” (Operational Plan, p.10)*

Four areas of the College are responsible for aspects of academic support services, specifically the Admissions and Registration Office; Learning Resource Centre; Services and Acquisitions Department, and respective academic departments. (Portfolio, p.51)

Substantial sections of the non-academic department annual plans are concerned with the planning of academic services. However, the transition to align this aspect of planning to the CAS Strategic Plan and CAS Ibri Operational Plan is still being undertaken (Portfolio, p.51) and the College indicates that this area of planning needs improvement. The Panel strongly supports the College's move to align these plans so that the work of the Admissions and Registration Office, the Learning Resources Centre and the Services and Acquisition Department supports the academic service requirements of the academic departments.

#### **Recommendation 17**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop comprehensive plans to integrate the requirements of academic departments within the College's annual plans so that effective academic support is provided.**



## 6.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)

The College rightly highlights the issue of student registrations where students are counted as fully enrolled before they complete the English proficiency requirement (Portfolio, p.53). Students who fail the Foundation Program are allowed to study elsewhere and retake the test. However, it seems that no student has successfully taken this option.

The College states in the Portfolio:

*"The newly established web based Student Information System (SIS) is expected to endeavour to improve the quality of the registration/ enrolment/ storing process" (p.54)*

The Panel ascertained that this system is now in use; it is important that the College makes use of this resource to develop an effective and comprehensive student information system that can be used by the various departments including the academic departments and Student Affairs. The Panel encourages the College to continue the integration of student information sources to develop an effective student information system.

## 6.3 Library

CAS Ibri expresses concern that following the change in the College's mission:

*"70% of the books available in the library are largely irrelevant to the new Programs" (Portfolio, p.62)*

This was confirmed by the Panel's observations in the College, and is clearly a matter for urgent attention. If the College's new programs are to be successful, students and academic staff must have access to basic and more advanced resources in appropriate subject areas (in English to support the new curriculum). The Panel noted that the library did not subscribe to relevant periodicals or newspapers and that those that were available were in Arabic. The majority of the books in the library were relevant for the College's previous programs and were also in Arabic. Considering that the College is moving into the final year of the new degree programs which are delivered in English, the Panel did not feel confident that the needs of the current programs, staff and students were being adequately met with the limited range of text books available in each subject area. One specific issue to be addressed is the delays in the process of acquisition.

### **Recommendation 18**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop and implement efficient and effective systems for the timely purchasing of books and learning materials and ensure that there are appropriate and sufficient library holdings for each program of study.**

The Panel felt that the library was adequately staffed and physically large enough to accommodate the learning needs of the College.

## 6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

The College states that it is committed to developing its IT infrastructure to facilitate computer-assisted learning (Portfolio, p.57). The Panel strongly supports this development as a means of better meeting the learning goals of the College. The Panel observed new computer laboratories, hardware and software of high standard in good working condition. The specialist laboratories are well designed and equipped. Maintenance systems are in place, although apparently

replacement of equipment can be time-consuming. The Panel was impressed with the construction of a new Educational Technology Centre on the campus which will provide additional IT academic learning support facilities.

### **Commendation 3**

**The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibri for its provision of IT facilities to support the academic programs.**

The Panel recognises the College's commitment to developing intranet and internet resources (Portfolio, pp.41, 64, and 78) and strongly supports this initiative as a means of facilitating communication within the College community (intranet) and with the wider community (internet). The Panel anticipates the College finalizing the yet undeveloped areas of the website.

### **Affirmation 5**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri for its ongoing development of the College website as an important interface between College staff and students and the community.**

The College is in the process of implementing learning technologies including the Blackboard course management system to improve its approaches to teaching and learning. The MoHE Programme Director for e-learning has been appointed to assist the Colleges to use the technology as an educational tool. The Panel's findings suggest that the preliminary training in Blackboard (Portfolio, pp.58, 62, 73) is being followed up by the College administration. Faculty uptake seems to be developing, with Blackboard being used both to make course materials available and to publish information such as grades among academic staff. The Panel found evidence that academic staff recognise the potential advantages of the e-learning technology and the need to better integrate this technology into programme delivery. Staff are actively considering how this is best done.

### **Affirmation 6**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri move towards incorporating e-learning technology and its commitment to more extensive application of this as an educational tool.**

One issue of concern to the Panel was the imbalance of IT provision to male students. Computer laboratories are divided according to gender, and the Panel noted that very few open access areas of laboratories are made available to the male students. The Panel concluded that this means that male students have less access to quality IT facilities. By having the open access laboratories made available to both male and female students, the College would ensure a more effective use of available resources and more equity in their provision.

### **Recommendation 19**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the IT areas to support student learning at College of Applied Sciences Ibri, including computing laboratories, be equally accessible to all students.**

## **6.5 Academic Advising**

The Panel supports the College plan to develop a more effective and efficient academic advising system (Portfolio, p.60). The Panel noted during its visit that advising in the present system puts a heavy load on the academic staff involved. There are challenges in contacting students and high ratios of advisees to advisors. This is particularly the case when a number of advisees are on probation. Current moves to better utilize the Blackboard technology for academic advising will

assist with student- advisor communication. The recent provision to staff of the booklet on how to conduct academic advising and other support materials indicates that the College has commenced improving the advising system. The Panel encourages the College to actively pursue this current initiative to improve the system in order to better facilitate students' academic decision making and support the advisor's role.

#### **Affirmation 7**

**The Oman Accreditation Council agrees with the College of Applied Sciences Ibri that the existing academic advising system needs to be improved and supports its efforts to more effectively and efficiently support the academic advising process.**

#### **6.6 *Student Learning Support***

CAS Ibri describes some extracurricular activities involving students (Portfolio, p.60). The Panel noted during its visit the implementation of tutorials and other support, and whilst the audit revealed no significant problems with student learning support, systems for identifying and supporting weaker students and those on probation could be more formalized and consistent across academic departments.

#### **6.7 *Teaching Resources***

In the Portfolio, the College describes a range of teaching resources including equipment and rooms (pp.61-62). During the visit, the Panel confirmed that teaching resources needs overall are suitably identified.

## 7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

This section of the Portfolio relates to the CAS network Strategic Goal 2:

*“Provide high quality education” (Operational Plan)*

Furthermore, one of the College’s values is:

*“Commitment: To students who are at the heart of everything [sic]” (Portfolio, p.24)*

Clearly, students are central to the College’s considerations and the Panel agreed that the provision of appropriate student support services to students was a key factor in assisting students to progress through their studies.

This section of the Portfolio is not treated in the same depth as other sections. The Panel formed the view that this area of the College activity was still under transition. There has been a move away from the administrative and support structures that addressed the needs of an all female College of Education, to structures that support a College of Applied Science with a different student profile and support needs. The College has still some way to go before this transition is complete.

### 7.1 *Students and Student Support Services Planning and Management*

Student support services at the College are dealt with by the Student Affairs Department, Admissions and Records Department, and the Finance Department. The Careers Guidance Centre attends to preparing students to be work ready. Departmental committees, some with student members, exist to run extracurricular activities (Portfolio, p.63).

Some of the administrative systems that exist, for example, having two differing sets of data about students, one set held by the Student Affairs Department and one set held by the Admissions and Records Department, will pose problems for the College in the future. The College recognises the importance of making the transition to one consolidated data set. The Panel encourages the two departments involved to liaise to make progress in merging these data sets so that the full data record can inform decisions regarding students.

The Panel encourages the College to be more aware of the importance of focusing on broadening the student experience to include elements that facilitate connections between students and the wider Ibri community and addressing this aspect of student support in its planning. As final year students prepare to graduate, there is an imperative for the College to assist students in their transition to the workforce. An aspect of this process is the development of strategies that encourage civic responsibility among students both individually and collectively. It is also important that this aspect of the final year's experience of students aligns with CAS Ibri's view of the graduate attributes it is seeking to cultivate in its students (see section 2.1).

With many aspects of CAS Ibri in a formative phase, it is premature to expect sophisticated quality assurance systems to be in place to monitor progress and reform systems. The Panel found little evidence to indicate that student feedback has been collected on a regular and systematic basis to inform improvements in support services to students. The College now intends to reintroduce placing the student evaluation survey instrument on its website (having suspended it in 2006) (Portfolio, p.41). The Panel encourages the College to reintroduce systems to gather student feedback data which informs improvements to its student support services. The

student complaints process (Portfolio, p.64) is similarly in a formative stage (see Recommendation 6).

## 7.2 *Student Profile*

As previously indicated, two student profile data sets are maintained. One data set is maintained by the Student Affairs Department on the student's social and personal details and the other by Admissions and Records on academic matters (Portfolio, p.63). The profile data is being consolidated into the new Student Information System already discussed in section 6.2 of this Report. The new system will enable analysis of student profile characteristics. The College's overall student profile is adapting to the changes in the College programs and other factors. The data from the audit visit suggests that the College is aware of these changes and is working to address them. However, as discussed previously in this Report (see Recommendation 14), the academic performance of male students is comparatively very weak and it is the Panel's opinion that CAS Ibri should investigate the reasons for this and put in place appropriate support programs. Consolidated student profile data can inform this investigation.

### **Affirmation 8**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri's efforts in adapting its systems to meet the needs of the new profile of the College.**

## 7.3 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

During interviews, students indicated to the Panel that, in general, they were satisfied with their experience at the College. The Panel was concerned that the "Centre of Excellence" concept in the CAS network, which requires students to transfer after the first year of general education, would be disruptive to students. This was found not to be the case, and students were comfortable with this concept.

The Panel was informed that some staff in the administrative support areas did not see student services as a priority and students considered that they did not have a good attitude toward assisting them. The Panel was told that the outcomes of student complaints were not always apparent to them. Some student surveys have been carried out (Portfolio, p.64) although the results appear not to have been analyzed or communicated to staff.

### **Recommendation 20**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop systems to regularly collect, analyse and disseminate student feedback on all aspects of student learning and support services.**

## 7.4 *Student Behaviour*

CAS Ibri states in the Portfolio:

*"the CAS Ibri Investigation Committee... has a primarily investigative role, leaving the enforcement of the rules regulating the students' academic discipline to the central Disciplinary Committee which operates at the Ministry level"* (Portfolio, p.65).

As student numbers increase, this arrangement is likely to be cumbersome for the College and for the central Disciplinary Committee; it would be desirable for the College to take a more active role in dealing with student behaviour. The Panel felt that this area was an area that could appropriately be devolved to the College as part of the move to greater autonomy already

discussed in section 1.3 and that the development of a College-based policy in this area would be appropriate.

#### **Recommendation 21**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that College of Applied Sciences Ibri develop the capacity to deal directly with student disciplinary matters.**

#### **7.5 Career and Employment Services**

The College's Careers Guidance Office has been established only recently, in response to the more industry-oriented nature of the new College programs (Portfolio, pp.65-6). Both staff and students felt that the appointment of the Careers Guidance Officer could have occurred earlier as there is a lot of work to be done to link the College to local industries. Students indicated that they needed more careers advice and that there was a lack of summer job placements.

The MoHE Program Director responsible for private sector liaison provides training for the newly appointed Careers Guidance Officers and is working with them to organize industrial placements. MoHE is aware that the timing of this activity is now an issue.

The Panel felt that the delay in funding approval for the Career Guidance Officer position at the College and the subsequent delay in appointing that Officer had the potential to impact on the quality of this aspect of this College activity. The College needs to address this issue.

#### **7.6 Student Finances**

There appear to be few issues in this area (Portfolio, p.66), and interviews during the Audit Visit confirmed that any relevant issues are dealt with appropriately.

#### **7.7 Accommodation, Catering and Transport**

CAS Ibri provides hostel accommodation with an overall capacity for 852 female students. Male students coming from outside Ibri find their own accommodation in the area. Financial assistance is provided to male students for this purpose. Staff informed the Panel that male students complain more than female students about College services and that the lack of hostel accommodation may influence this general level of dissatisfaction. The College reported that a plan was being considered by the MoHE to build residential halls so as to provide free accommodation for both female and male students.

#### **Affirmation 9**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the efforts of the College of Applied Sciences Ibri (in conjunction with MoHE) to build additional residential halls for both male and female students and to ensure that the male student accommodation needs are catered for.**

It appears from the evidence presented in the Portfolio and from interview data that the provision of accommodation for female students greatly assists their chances of academic success, and that part of the reason for substantially greater male attrition may arise from "unequal access to facilities, notably the library and LRC" (Portfolio, p.46). This problem is addressed in Recommendation 19.

The College should examine how the provision of male residential facilities could address the major issues of poor performance and attrition of male students and their overall satisfaction level.

A contracted catering service supplies the canteens. The College provides free transport services for off campus activities which are part of the student programs as well as for emergencies (Portfolio, pp.66-67). The Panel concluded that, although there was some feedback regarding food quality, the systems for dealing with catering and transport are working effectively.

Student involvement in areas of College operations which impinge on students' daily life can lead to more effective meeting of student needs and enhanced leadership capacity among students. The Panel supports the College's efforts to develop a policy to include students on departmental committees for example, involving students in discussion of catering services. Interviews conducted during the Panel's audit visit confirmed that the College has made use of students' contributions in this area. The Panel strongly supports this initiative as a means of better meeting student needs.

#### **Affirmation 10**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri's efforts to involve students in departmental committees and seek their views on College services including the provision of catering services.**

#### **7.8 *Medical and Counselling Facilities***

The College relies on readily available public health facilities, but is considering the possibility of its own medical centre (Portfolio, p.68). There is a strong working relationship with the local hospital and that whilst there might be an understandable wish for the College to have its own medical clinic, it was clear to the Panel that students receive appropriate medical service from the current arrangement.

The College does not have a professional counselling facility for students to access if they have problems of a personal or social nature. The Student Affairs Department provides support in this regard and there is a limited access website on which students can post problems of a confidential nature. The Panel encourages the College to seek formal student feedback regarding their satisfaction with these support systems to ensure that they are meeting their needs (see Recommendation 20).

#### **7.9 *International Student Services***

At present, the very small number of international students at the College does not necessitate a developed support system; however the College is benefiting from its experiences with these students to date to plan for the future (Portfolio, p.39).

#### **7.10 *Social and Recreational Services and Facilities***

Recreational services are overseen by the Student Affairs Department (Portfolio, p.69). The social and recreational services of the College appear to be adequate for the current population at the present stage in the College's development; however, male students would like to see more sporting facilities developed.

## 8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

Strategic Goal 2 of the CAS network Strategic Plan aims at providing high quality education. One of the objectives supporting this goal is providing high standard teaching. The College states that development of strategies such as hiring and maintaining high quality academic staff and providing professional development for academic staff shows intention to support and develop staff to staff support and development (Portfolio, p.72). The College also identified the importance of providing a positive and supportive environment to its staff as indicated in Strategic Goal 4.

The Portfolio, supporting materials and the interviews conducted showed that the College is dedicated to improving teaching and learning and at the same time creating an improved work environment. However, many aspects of this are still at an early stage of planning and development.

The Panel was provided with evidence from variety of sources including students, about the willingness and the professionalism of staff at the College to support students and student learning activities, often under difficult circumstances of resource constraints and low staffing numbers in some disciplines.

Students and staff provided examples of how academic staff had gone out of their way to assist students in difficulties and on probation, how individual staff had shown considerable resourcefulness in dealing with challenging and sometimes pressured circumstances, for example, delayed provision of teaching materials. Staff in the Foundation Program and in the academic programs had consistently made themselves available to support student learning and achievement beyond normal requirements. Other examples given to the Panel related to the willingness of staff to undertake additional duties and roles on top of already extensive teaching duties, and supporting students without additional recompense.

The Panel considered that, overall, the commitment of academic staff to students at the College was impressive.

### 8.1 *Human Resources Planning and Management*

It is stated in the Portfolio that the College aspires to secure a sufficient number of competent staff as a prerequisite for the provision of high calibre services (Portfolio, p.69). Although three different approaches are used to recruit academic staff members, the College has found it difficult to secure enough academic staff to meet its needs.

Identification of staffing needs is done within the College but recruitment takes place centrally through the MoHE. The management of staff issues such as salaries and leave is performed either in the MoHE or in the College depending on the type of recruitment contract.

The Panel found that staff teaching loads ranged between 14 and 18 contact hours per week. Some staff felt that they could not do other work such as research because of their heavy teaching schedules. Furthermore, the actual number of staff in the different departments is not proportionate to the student numbers enrolled in those programs or courses offered by each department, thus resulting in varying workloads across departments. This indicates clearly that staff recruitment and planning are not entirely effective. No evidence was found to support staff involvement in the workload planning process.



## 8.2 *Staff Profile*

It is noted in the Portfolio that the number of academic staff in the College has decreased from 100 in 2003 to 42 in 2005 due to the phasing out of the education programs and the reduction of academic departments from seven to four (Portfolio, p.70). This has resulted in more staff holding Bachelor and Masters degrees compared to those with PhDs. In the academic departments, most of the teaching faculty have Masters degrees whilst in the English Language Department most staff have Bachelor's degrees. The Panel did not find evidence that the College compared this staff qualifications profile with other institutions in Oman or internationally. The Panel did not find evidence of a plan to overcome the issue of the small number of PhD holders apart from sending some Omanis to pursue their higher studies abroad. It would be prudent for the College to develop a staff recruitment and professional development plan that ensures that the College's staff qualifications profile is comparable with other HEIs in Oman and internationally. The small number of PhD holders may affect the College plans for research.

The significant overhaul of the remuneration and benefits endorsed by the MoHE (Portfolio, p.70) may help attract sufficient numbers of staff with higher qualifications. The Panel observed a lack of relevant industrial experience amongst teaching staff. The Panel believes that the College may find it difficult to pursue its new applied science focus if links with industry are not well-established to ensure that students have sufficient industrial experience. The Panel understands that the College plans may be restricted by the limited number of industries in the region; however this issue needs consideration.

## 8.3 *Recruitment and Selection*

The College states its staffing needs, interviews and appointments are handled centrally by the MoHE and therefore the College is not involved in scrutinizing curriculum vitae or interviewing applicants. The Panel maintains that some involvement of the College in recruiting its staff is critical to success. Furthermore, there is no evidence of any review or planning of staffing in relation to student numbers across departments in the College resulting in excesses and shortages of staff in varying departments. It was noticed that such differences tended to affect staff perceptions about workload. Staffing need is identified on an annual basis, a few months before the start of the academic year but it is stated in the Portfolio that long-term planning is required. Staff are recruited through three types of contract. The Panel had concerns that staff members may be receiving different benefits for the same work, depending on the type of contract signed, and this would affect their satisfaction with their employment. The College needs to investigate this issue.

## 8.4 *Induction*

Although the Human Resources (HR) Department had developed an Induction Manual, the College states that the induction of new staff is largely sporadic and does not constitute a full induction program (Portfolio, p.73). Formal induction of new staff takes place during the first week of the academic year and is facilitated by the HR personnel. This includes distributing the induction manual and making a tour in the College. There was no evidence that staff who join the College after the first week receive the same attention. The Panel found that some staff were happy with the induction they received while others felt it was not enough. This finding supports CAS Ibri's view suggesting that some staff left the College a short time after their arrival due to inadequate induction (Portfolio, p.73). It was also observed that the induction program varies from department to department. The Panel agrees with the College that some new academic staff continue to feel ill-informed. The College is encouraged to continue its systematic and systemic development of staff induction to ensure that all new staff are well prepared to undertake their duties.

### **Affirmation 11**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the efforts of the College of Applied Sciences Ibri to improve its approach to staff induction throughout the College.**

#### **8.5 Professional Development**

CAS Ibri plans to “*provide professional development for academic staff as required*” according to Strategy 2.2.B of the Strategic Plan. It is explained in the Operational Plan that Heads of Department identify the areas for improvement every semester. The Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs then develops the training programs accordingly, three weeks before the end of semester. The College described several staff development programs (Portfolio, p.73) such as short-term programs which include training courses and symposia within the College or in Oman. Medium and long term programs which require paid or unpaid study leave are managed centrally at the MoHE and are only for Omani staff and academic staff. These include staff who want to pursue further studies.

The College indicates in its Operational Plan that the performance appraisal of staff will be the basis for identifying training needs. The Panel could not find evidence of an annual plan for staff professional development. Also, there were no plans to support life-long learning of individuals. Although the College has conducted some programs to improve the skills of academic staff members such as the courses on Computer Assisted Learning and the two-day Blackboard training program, there was no evidence of a comprehensive plan that focuses on developing the teaching skills of academic staff members and encourages better student-centered learning.

The Panel did not find evidence of any annual budget given to the College to support its training programs. Only one academic staff member interviewed had been supported by the College to attend a conference outside Oman. It appears that this was an isolated case and there is no budget or professional development plan committed to supporting staff to attend conferences of workshops abroad.

### **Recommendation 22**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri urgently develop a comprehensive academic staff development plan along with policy and procedures for the adequate provision of resources to support this plan.**

Background statements to the CAS Ibri Operational Plan highlight the challenges in shifting from an Arabic medium institution into an English Medium one. One response to these challenges is to improve the English language skills of the administrative staff by running English language courses. The Panel was informed that the College offers free English language courses to its administrative staff to help improve their communication skills. The success of these courses was confirmed during the interviews and the Panel believes that it is a very important initiative

### **Commendation 4**

**The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibri for its initiative in providing English language courses for administrative staff which will enable staff to operate more efficiently in the College.**

#### **8.6 Performance Planning and Review**

The Operational Plan of the College includes performance indicators for the different human resources management strategies. However, no indicators or numerical measurements were given

for some strategies such as the strategies “develop job description for each staff member/department” and “performance criteria for each department/staff member” (Operational Plan). Developing the job description and performance criteria for the different members and departments needs clear tasks with proper key performance indicators. CAS Ibri indicated in the Portfolio (p.74) that academic staff performance is reviewed each semester, including the use of a 360-degree feedback system. However, the Panel could not find evidence to show how academic staff performance review is used for planning purposes.

### **8.7 Promotion and Other Incentives**

The College follows the government promotion scheme for administrative staff who are automatically promoted to the next financial grade every four years (Portfolio, p.75). This is managed by the central promotion committee which is located in the MoHE. This system does not distinguish between those who work hard and others. However, the Panel could not find evidence to show, although some distinguished staff may receive some cash gifts or may be selected as best employee. On the other hand, those who receive higher qualifications while working may request a promotion to the relevant grade.

Academic staff are promoted based on research, Academic Board endorsement and the availability of funds for the promoted position (Portfolio, p.75). This system is only applicable to Omanis. To make promotions fairer, a new Charter has been issued to address this issue for both Omani and non-Omani staff. The Panel was encouraged by this development.

### **8.8 Severance**

The severance process may be initiated by academic staff member or the College without stating any reason. However, the College is not able to terminate the contract of an academic staff member but must forward its intention of termination of contract to the MoHE where the decision is taken by the Recruitment Committee (Portfolio, p.76).

### **8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention**

The College recognizes that this is an area which needs to be developed and has plans to carry out a survey amongst all staff (Portfolio, p.76). The Panel noted a friendly atmosphere has been created in the College. However, this atmosphere and departmental social activities including camps and trips may not be sufficient to maintain staff morale in a challenging environment of transition. The Panel did not find evidence of a systematic approach to improve the facilities that serve the staff such as, for example, recreational activities and a staff club and the College could consider developing an improvement plan in this area.

### **8.10 Omanisation**

Whilst most of the College’s administrative staff are Omani, there are few Omani teaching staff. The MoHE target is for 40% graduate academic staff by 2010 (Portfolio, p.76). In 2008, the College had 9 Omani academic staff (about 12%) compared to 64 expatriates (Portfolio, p.12). Whilst CAS Ibri may not meet its target of 40% some of the recommendations regarding staff support and professional development made earlier in this Report will assist the College in improving its level of participating Omani teaching staff.

## 9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

### 9.1 *General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management*

In relation to the planning and organization of general services, the Panel had some difficulty in identifying clear lines of responsibility and reporting in relation to resource planning and service provision. While it was evident from the Portfolio that campus management planning was largely determined by the MoHE, and “the management of services and facilities was regulated to ensure accountability and protection” (Portfolio, p.80), it proved difficult for the Panel to get a clear picture of the planning and organization functions which allow the physical organization of the College and the provision of services to be directly related back to its core strategic planning processes.

On the basis of student and staff feedback, the Panel formed the overall impression that general support services and facilities at the College were valued, and while there was occasional dissatisfaction expressed with specific services such as catering provision, there was evidence that the College’s response to user feedback and subsequent planned improvements were appreciated.

The structure of the College and the inter-relationship of buildings, assets, personnel and service provision are physical manifestations of strategic planning to address clear goals and responsibilities. While these are constrained by available resources, it appeared that not everyone involved in those responsibilities had a clear picture of their relative components or goal-focused contribution, nor how they contributed to the resource planning and management processes. A clearer structure for organizational responsibilities in relation to general support services and facilities management, as stated in the last statement in the Portfolio, would not only assist with improved efficiencies, but would also allow improved lines of reporting and accountability. The Panel observed that progress had already been made in identifying overlaps in the areas of student services and registry.

#### **Affirmation 12**

**The Oman Accreditation Council supports the College of Applied Sciences Ibri’s efforts to clearly define service areas’ roles and responsibilities to avoid overlaps.**

### 9.2 *Public Relations and Marketing*

The Public Relations Department is involved with establishing effective external communications, especially with the local community; handling public enquiries, disseminating good news about College activities and explaining the life and work of the College to outside audiences. In the long term, the work of this department, can bring substantial benefits to the graduates of the College and may assist in attracting excellent staff. The Panel formed a positive view of the way that the College was making considerable efforts to reach out to prospective students and their families, although the College does not have to directly recruit its students. It was evident that a great deal of planning and energy has gone in to the ways in which a positive public image of the College can be created, although this will be initially a slow process of improving information flow and managing external impressions and relationships.

The recent establishment of a Career Guidance function and position will also help to build relationships with local industry and employers as well as assist prospective graduates with employment opportunities.

### 9.3 *Communication Services*

The Panel noted the range of publications coming from the College, including newsletters and newspapers, which appeared to demonstrate effective teamwork between the College and its own Department of Communication Studies.

The activities of the Department of Communication Studies, such as production of “The Ibrians” newspaper and the successful recent “Communication Show”, which received praise from a number of students, were clear evidence of ways in which academic staff and student activities related to their studies could also be used effectively to serve College needs, encourage debate and information flow, and simultaneously promote a positive and attractive image of the College and its programs. It was clear that these activities also had the potential to help build the sense of community within the College.

#### **Commendation 5**

**The Oman Accreditation Council commends the College of Applied Sciences Ibri on its range of publications, for example, “The Ibrians”, and its external communication activities.**

A new public website for the College became functional in the week of the quality audit, and first impressions were that it had promising content and presentation, although a number of features had yet to reach full functionality, including student feedback surveys.

In terms of internal communication systems within the College, it was not clear to the Panel to what extent the use of email and paper mail had been effectively coordinated. There were some examples presented, both in the Portfolio (Portfolio, p.79) and in Panel interviews, that difficulties with internal information flow had the potential to slow down if not impede internal efficiencies. Section 1.3 of this Report discussed the potential of alternate communication strategies if monthly staff meeting could not be held. CAS Ibri currently lacks an intranet facility or similar internal communication systems that might assist decision making and/or dissemination of decisions throughout the College community and this needs to be addressed.

#### **Recommendation 23**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri strengthen the use of electronic communication in the information and communication systems to assist decision making and ensure timely information provision to the College community.**

It also appeared that some materials were only available in Arabic, which created difficulties for many academic staff who were non-Arabic speakers. The cultural and linguistic diversity of the academic staff at CAS Ibri was seen by many to be a distinctively beneficial feature of the College’s staffing profile in that such staff brought with them a rich array of qualifications and experience to inform their teaching and the intellectual life of the College. However, where key academic materials and policies were only available in Arabic, some staff from a non-Arabic language background experienced comparative disadvantage in being able to access such materials and to implement them effectively. The Panel noted that official internal correspondence and communications were in Arabic and this posed problems to non-Arabic speaking staff who needed to seek translations of documents. These documents could be of a confidential or sensitive nature relating to personnel issues.

Similarly in the case of students, English is clearly intended to be the language of instruction, yet students stated that “sometimes we are being prepared in Arabic for examinations in English”, and relevant documents and communications for students were sometimes available only in Arabic. The Panel suggests that a consistently bilingual approach in the major documentation of

the College, and in its modes of communication with staff and students, would assist both staff and students, send a strong message about communication expectations, and ensure effective dissemination, understanding and application of key policies and assist with organizational and administrative efficiency. Such staff and student communications would include handbooks containing academic and administrative policies; official internal correspondence; and health and safety information provision.

#### **Recommendation 24**

**The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the College of Applied Sciences Ibri adopt a bilingual approach to all relevant communication and documentation to ensure that it is accessible to all staff and students.**

#### **9.4 Facilities Management**

The management of facilities is regulated to ensure accountability. In the Portfolio, the College states that it is aware of the potential for some conflicts of interest in areas which affect efficiency (Portfolio, p.80). In section 9.1 of this Report, the Panel has supported the College's plan to ensure a clearer definition of roles in service areas.

**APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL**

Dr. Shoba Zachariah (Panel Chairperson)  
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Majan College (University College)  
Sultanate of Oman

Mr. Ian Hawke  
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Tertiary and Non-State Education  
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Prof. Deborah Clayton (Executive Officer)  
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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.

ADRI .....	A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising: Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.
Approach .....	The first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating what a HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to achieve it.
BoT .....	Board of Trustees
CAS .....	Colleges of Applied Sciences. A network of six colleges under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education
CAS Ibri .....	College of Applied Sciences Ibri
CGO .....	Career Guidance Office
Deployment .....	The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a CAS Ibri plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.
Director General .....	Government officer in charge of a Directorate
Executive Officer .....	An OAC staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide professional guidance and support.
External Reviewer .....	A Member of the OAC Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAC Board to participate as a member of the OAC's various external review Panels.
HEI .....	Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider)
HR .....	Human Resources
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> .
MoF .....	Ministry of Finance
MoHE .....	Ministry of Higher Education ( <a href="http://www.mohe.gov.om">www.mohe.gov.om</a> )
MoU .....	Memorandum of Understanding
NZTEC .....	New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium
OAC .....	Oman Accreditation Council ( <a href="http://www.oac.gov.om">www.oac.gov.om</a> )
OAC Board.....	The governing body of the Oman Accreditation Council
OFI .....	Opportunity for improvement.
OQF .....	Oman Qualifications Framework.
Panel Chairperson .....	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member .....	An OAC External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
Portfolio.....	see <i>Quality Audit Portfolio</i> .
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 CAS IBRI 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 OAC by the CAS IBRI being audited.
Quality Audit Report .....	A public report published by the OAC which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel's External Review of a CAS IBRI.
Quality Enhancement .....	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing <i>approach, deployment</i> and <i>results</i> .
Results .....	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> .
System .....	In this Report, <i>system</i> refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.



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