



Oman Academic
Accreditation Authority

**Report of a General
Foundation Program Quality
Audit of the International
Maritime College Oman**

February 2018

GFP Quality Audit Report Number 001
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OVERVIEW OF THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit Report (the ‘Report’) documents the findings of a GFP Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) of the International Maritime College Oman (IMCO).

The GFP Quality Audit followed the process of audit as outlined in OAAA’s General Foundation Program Quality Audit Manual¹. The GFP Quality Audit also used the *Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs*² (‘GFP Standards’) as an external reference point.

The GFP Quality Audit commenced with IMCO undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems in relation to its GFP. The results were summarized in their *GFP Portfolio* (the ‘Portfolio’). This document was submitted to the OAAA on the 26 February 2017.

The OAAA appointed an external GFP Quality Audit Panel (the ‘Panel’), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the GFP Quality Audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 11 April 2017 to consider IMCO’s GFP Portfolio. Following this, the Panel Chairperson and a representative of the Review Director undertook a Planning Visit on behalf of the Panel to IMCO on 23 April 2017 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel’s audit visit.

Prior to the audit visit, the Panel formally invited submissions from the public about the quality of IMCO’s activities in relation to the GFP. No public submissions were received using this process.

The GFP Quality Audit visit took place from 14 to 18 May 2017. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 70 people, including management staff, teaching staff, support services staff, students and alumni. They also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

No information provided after 23 May 2017 (being the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit, other than pre-existing evidence specifically requested by the Panel in advance and/or submitted by the HEI in response to GFPQA Report v5.

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

The Panel’s audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. This Report was approved by the OAAA Board on 19 February 2018.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No. 54/2010. For further information, visit the OAAA website (<http://www.oaaa.gov.om>).

¹ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/To%20upload-FINAL-GFP%20Quality%20Audit%20Manual%2025%20April%202017.pdf>

² <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/GFP%20Standards%20FINAL.pdf>

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

The Report is made public because it also may be of interest to students and potential students, their families, employers, government, other higher education institutions in Oman and abroad, and other audiences. Students, in particular, may find this Report useful because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2 and 3 below). However, prospective students should still undertake their own investigations when deciding which higher education institution will best serve their particular learning needs.

The focus of the GFP Quality Audit is formative (developmental) rather than summative. In other words, although the audit addresses four areas of activity which are common to all GFPs, it does not measure the program against externally set standards of performance in those four areas. Instead, it considers how well the institution is attending to those areas in accordance with its own Mission and Vision, in the context of relevant legal regulations, and guided by the current GFP Standards as an external reference point. Therefore, GFP Quality Audit recognises that each institution and its GFP has a unique purpose and profile; it does not directly compare one institution's GFP with all the other institutions' GFPs in Oman.

For these reasons, a GFP Quality Audit does not result in a pass or fail; nor does it provide any sort of grade or score. It should also be noted that the precise number of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations that the GFP 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 GFP Audit Reports of different HEIs solely on the numbers of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations.

For more information on Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education, please visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

This Report contains a number of references to source evidence considered by the Audit Panel. These references are for the HEI's benefit in further addressing the issues raised. In most cases, this evidence is not in the public domain.

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report, and are not prioritised. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Executive Summary of Findings

The International Maritime College Oman (IMCO), a private College, was established in April 2005 as a joint venture between the Omani Government and the Shipping and Transport College (STC) Group, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. At the time of the audit, there were approximately 2,000 students studying at the College, which offers undergraduate, postgraduate and short courses in areas related to the Port, Shipping, Transport or Process Industries. The College campus location is, fittingly, next to the Sohar Industrial Port and surrounding industrial area.

The GFP is run by the Foundation Department (FND), which was established in 2006. In the 2015-2016 academic year, there were 428 students studying this program which covers English, Mathematics and Computing. Study Skills are embedded in the curriculum of all GFP subjects and English for Special Purposes is predominantly embedded in the students' post GFP studies. The program structure is such that placement test results determine at which level (specifically A, B, CA and CB) students commence the year-long program. All levels run simultaneously during the year, the difference in study levels being the pace of content delivery and the resources used.

Overall, the Panel found that the self-study Portfolio was clear and well written. The Portfolio reflected the use of the ADRI method (See Appendix B for an explanation of ADRI) for the self-review. However, while the Panel found the self-review to be strong on the descriptions of action taken, process, facilities and resources, the report lacked evidence on the impact of these interventions. The Panel determined that a consultative process was used to develop the Portfolio and that the FND Curriculum Committee and the Quality Assurance Manager played a pivotal role in the development of the Portfolio.

The Panel confirmed that the GFP's Mission and Vision are appropriate for a preparatory program of study for IMCO and developed to align with the College's Mission and Vision. These inform the strategic and operational goal setting and the planning processes for the College as a whole and the individual Departments.

IMCO is aware of the need to respond to external reviews regarding aspects of its governance and management. This particularly relates to committees at both the College and FND level having clear terms of reference and reporting lines. The Panel found that the informality of reporting and the nature of the lines of accountability and responsibility impacted on the ability of the College to make informed decisions regarding improvements to the GFP and the College needs to review the effectiveness of these governance and management arrangements.

Regarding operational planning, IMCO has institutionalized its strategic planning processes and aligned strategic goal and operational objective setting for the FND. There are separate operational plans for the FND and departments providing services to the GFP, including Student Affairs and Admissions and Registration. The monitoring and review systems of the FND operation plan require attention, as does the alignment of operational planning systems of these service areas to ensure that the operational objectives of the development, delivery, monitoring and review of the GFP can be achieved.

The Panel found a lack of documented improvement plans which had been developed for the GFP based on stakeholder's and external consultant's feedback. As a result, the Panel were not able to evaluate the effectiveness of the systems that the College had in place to improve the GFP. It concluded that IMCO needed to develop a more formal process to use various stakeholder feedback regarding the GFP, develop improvement plans, monitor their impact, and communicate the outcomes of these interventions to stakeholders.

Regarding health and safety matters, the College has a well-established health, safety and environment policy which is institutionalized through a health and safety action plan. This plan is implemented effectively and regularly monitored. The Panel was particularly impressed with the robustness and effectiveness of these systems to ensure the health and safety of both staff and students.

The Panel heard that recent improvements to the GFP had included the introduction of placement testing, quality staff development, and curriculum reform. The Panel encountered mixed views on the preparedness of GFP students for their undergraduate studies, and found that the College had a responsive rather than formal approach to GFP curriculum review. To address some of the concerns of preparedness, the College has commenced the integration, through examples, case studies, and assessment tasks of an English for Specific Purposes context into the development and delivery of the GFP modules. The Panel supports this approach.

It was pleasing to see the significant progress made by IMCO in establishing risk management systems and its increased focus on addressing academic risk. Given the low pass rates in Levels B and CA and CB, the College needs to review the alignment of content and delivery of the GFP to the various entry levels to ensure that students with differing abilities in English, Maths and IT can be supported to progress to the required exit standards. Furthermore, the implementation of appropriate entry and exit assessment procedures in all GFP subject areas and a rigorous review system to test the validity, reliability and equivalency to international standards of these procedures is required.

IMCO needs to implement a structured approach to GFP student progression and retention data collection and analysis in order to make informed decisions that enhance student learning. Additionally, it would benefit from establishing systems to identify students at risk and developing interventions to support their progress. The College is in the process of implementing a new e-management system "Enterprise Resource Planning" (ERP) to handle the Registry's enrolment and student records. The Panel encourages the College to expedite the implementation of the functions of this system to enable improved admission and enrolment procedures, generate reports to inform decision making and ensure the security of student records for the GFP.

The College has introduced a new academic advising system and comprehensive implementation of evaluation mechanisms will contribute to assuring its effectiveness. IMCO is aware of the limitations of the current housing situation of the GFP staff office and Library. The Panel encourages the College to improve this situation particularly with regard to the adequacy of physical library space for student activity, and the conduct of academic advising activities, to assure the learning and progress of students on the GFP.

Regarding the non-academic student support services and facilities, a cohort of FND students have recently provided feedback on their satisfaction with the canteen services. Other surveys to determine student satisfaction with the wider range of non-academic services have been completed by all IMCO students so it was not possible to identify FND student satisfaction with these services. The College needs to address and develop systems to obtain feedback from this specific cohort of students to ensure that its non-academic services and facilities meet their needs.

The Panel found that there was positive practice in place regarding staffing in FND. The staff have the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to meet the needs of the GFP students; there is a large percentage of Omani staff who work on the GFP; and the College provides an effective program of support and development to enhance the skills of Omani teachers. Teaching staff undergo an annual

performance appraisal process which includes a variety of inputs. The Panel found the process would benefit from a review and strengthening so that teachers were clear on what they had done well and what they should do to improve their teaching practice.

The College would benefit from reviewing its approach to the collection of staff feedback in order to identify FND staff as a distinct staff cohort and consider their perceptions of the program and their working conditions and using the information to identify areas for development. Furthermore, staff undertaking GFP level coordination duties currently lack clear role specifications with reporting lines, as do some administrative staff; and the College should address this to support a positive organizational climate.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the International Maritime College Oman for its robust and effective systems to ensure the health and safety of both GFP students and staff on campus as well as modeling the importance of these systems in a maritime environment.15
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the International Maritime College Oman on the effective approach to staff recruitment, training and support which has resulted in the high percentage of Omani teaching staff who work on the GFP.34

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the International Maritime College Oman in establishing a risk management system and encourages the College to ensure that the system is implemented systematically and that it regularly measures its effectiveness particularly in regard to reducing the risk of students being unsuccessful in undertaking the GFP.14
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the International Maritime College Oman's integration of an English for Specific Purposes context into the development and delivery of the GFP modules and encourages the College to plan and review this aspect of provision to determine its contribution to student preparedness for further studies.17
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the International Maritime College Oman's introduction of the Enterprise Resource Planning system and encourages the College to expedite the implementation of its functions to enable improved admission and enrollment procedures, generate reports to inform decision making for the GFP.....26
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the International Maritime College Oman's introduction of the revised academic advising system for GFP students and agrees that the College can improve its effectiveness through a more comprehensive implementation and evaluation of this system.28

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review the effectiveness of its GFP governance and management arrangements including the appropriate representation and formal reporting channels at College level to support effective decision making, monitoring and action planning to improve GFP delivery.12
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman align the operational planning systems of all departmental areas involved in the delivery of the GFP and strengthen the collective oversight of these plans to ensure that all operational objectives related to the development, delivery, monitoring and review of the program are achieved.13
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman develop and implement a formal process to using various stakeholder feedback regarding the GFP; develop and implement improvement plans, monitor their impact, and communicate the outcomes of these processes to stakeholders.....14
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review the alignment of the content and delivery of the GFP with the various entry levels and associated academic support system to ensure that students with differing abilities in English, Maths and IT can be supported to progress to the required exit standards.19
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman implement appropriate entry and exit assessment procedures in all GFP subject areas to establish the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for their post GFP studies and ensure that these tests are subject to rigorous review to establish test validity and reliability.20
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman implement a structured approach to GFP student progression and retention data collection and analysis, in order to make informed decisions that enhance student learning in the program.24
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman reconsider the adequacy of the physical library space for study activity and explore alternative locations in which to conduct academic advising sessions to assure effective learning and support the progress of students on the GFP.27
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review its systems to identify students at risk and ensure that interventions support their progression in the GFP.....29
9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review and strengthen its observation and performance appraisal process so that GFP teachers are clear on what they have done well and what they should do to improve their teaching practice further.33
10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman produce clear role specifications with reporting lines for GFP coordinators and administrative staff in order to recognize the roles performed by these staff.....33
11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman implement the collection of staff feedback so that it can identify the FND

staff as a distinct cohort in order to analyse their perceptions of the program and their working conditions and use the information to formulate areas for development.34

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The International Maritime College Oman (IMCO), a private College, was established in April, 2005 as a joint venture between the Omani Government and the STC Group, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. At the time of the audit, there were approximately 2,000 students studying at the College which offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs and short courses in areas related to the Port, Shipping, Transport or Process Industries. The College campus location is, fittingly, next to the Sohar Industrial Port and surrounding industrial area.

The GFP is run by the Foundation Department (FND) which was established in 2006. In the 2015-2016 academic year there were 428 students studying this program (Portfolio, p.10). Prior to 2011, the GFP was of two years duration. At the time of the audit, it was of one-year duration and covers English, Maths and Computing. Study Skills are embedded in the curriculum and English for Specific Purposes is predominantly embedded in the students' post GFP studies. The program structure is such that placement test results determine at which level (specifically A, B, CA and CB) students commence the year-long program. All levels run simultaneously during the year, the difference in study levels being the pace of content delivery and the resources used.

The College indicates that the GFP follows guidelines of the MoHE for such programs and is benchmarked against the "Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs" (Portfolio, p.24).

This Chapter reports on governance and management of the GFP and includes the Panel's findings related to the College's Mission, Vision and Values; governance and management; operational planning; financial and risk management; systems for monitoring and review; student grievance process; and health and safety considerations.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

IMCO has developed its Strategic Plan with a set of objectives. In the year 2011, the FND developed its Vision and Mission in conjunction with IMCO's Vision, Mission and values. IMCO FND's Vision and Mission are published on the College website and communicated to staff and students through official publications such as the Student Handbook and awareness cards provided to new teachers.

The current FND Vision and Mission statements and Strategic Goals are:

Vision Statement:

To support IMCO in becoming a leading Higher Education Institution in Oman, the region and beyond by offering high quality education that will enable students to study effectively in Diploma/Degree levels and on Short Courses.

Mission Statement:

To enable Foundation students to develop a level of English language proficiency and basic Maths and IT skills that will facilitate their studies at Diploma/Degree levels.

The Strategic Goals of the FND are stated as a highlighted subset of the IMCO goals, specifically:

Goal 2: We will implement curricula of international standards by a process of continuous review and updating.

Goal 3: We will provide high quality teaching and training within a rich, stimulating learning environment.

Goal 4: We will equip students with knowledge, skills and personal attributes that will enable them to be productive and effective.

Goal 5: We will engage constructively and effectively with industry and the community.

Goal 7: We will provide professional development opportunities for all academic and administrative staff. (FND Operational Plans 2016-2017, p.4)

It was indicated to the Panel that the FND's Vision and Mission are translated into this subset of the IMCO goals. Associated actions are described in an annual Operational Plan which is discussed at Curriculum Committee meetings with the GFP coordinators. The management of the Operational Plan is maintained by the FND Head of Department (HoD).

The Panel confirmed that the FNDs Mission and Vision are appropriate for a preparatory program of study for IMCO and well aligned to the College's Mission and Vision.

1.2 Governance and Management Arrangements

As part of IMCO's Strategic Plan 2016-2020, an objective was set *"To ensure the structure of IMCO remains relevant and effective with clear lines of authority, roles and responsibilities"*, (Strategic Plan, p.4).

The FND, which delivers the GFP, is one of the four academic departments at IMCO: Foundation, Logistics and Transport Management, Process Engineering, and Maritime. The Dean heads the College, and is assisted by two Deputy Deans, the Deputy Dean of Academic Affairs (DDAA), and the Deputy Dean of Support Services (DDSS). Whilst IMCO's Dean is ultimately responsible for the GFP, the day-to-day management of the program is delegated to the HoD FND. The HoD FND reports to the DDAA for all matters related to the GFP (Portfolio, pp.12-13).

The FND has one committee, the FND Curriculum Committee, chaired by the HoD. The HoD is a member of a number of College-level committees providing the management link to these governance committees (Portfolio, p.13). The FND Curriculum Committee reports to the IMCO Curriculum Committee. The effectiveness of the Curriculum Committee with respect to Curriculum oversight is discussed in Section 2.2.

The FND management arrangements at IMCO are currently structured with a HoD, department coordinator, level (A) coordinator, level (B) coordinator, level (CA) coordinator, level (CB) coordinator, a Maths and IT coordinator, Foundation Society coordinator and all teachers (Portfolio, p.14). The FND coordinator and level coordinators assist the HoD in running the program. Each level coordinator is responsible for providing feedback on day-to-day operations pertaining to their level. The HoD meets twice a semester with all the teaching staff and coordinators (Portfolio, p.13). Major activities are handled by the HoD in liaison with the DDAA and the Panel notes that operational issues with the delivery of the GFP are escalated to the DDAA (Portfolio, p.13).

As part of its self-review process, IMCO recruited an external consultant to review its FND operations. The resulting report, the FND External Review Report 2016, highlighted the need for committees at both the College and FND level to have clear terms of reference and reporting lines. The Panel noted some progress in terms of responding to these recommendations. In terms of curriculum development, a Curriculum Committee is in place with defined roles and

responsibilities; the committee is responsible for revising modules and preparing assessments. However, the Panel confirmed that whilst meetings are conducted to discuss various relevant matters to the GFP, the outcomes of the Curriculum Committee meetings are not regularly documented in a manner to support the tracking and monitoring of its decisions and the effectiveness of their actions.

The HoD FND was not available for interview during the audit visit, as he was off campus at that time. The Panel observed that whilst the HoD is a member of College-level Committees, there does not appear to be an effective governance structure and management at FND level to enable informed decisions regarding improvements to the GFP; for example, addressing, in a systematic manner, the recommendations from the FND External Review Report 2016 and reviewing the FND operational plans so that academic support resource allocation is appropriate. This needs to be addressed.

Furthermore, while IMCO made available to the Panel a rich evidence base on many aspects of the GFP, the Panel found that there is no overall process that evaluates the effectiveness of the governance and management arrangements for the GFP. Such a process could include analysis of what aspects are working well and where improvements are needed. It could be beneficial to FND and IMCO staff working in other departments, as it could support monitoring and evaluation and the implementation of timely improvements. The requirement to formalise these quality improvement processes in specific areas relating to the GFP will be addressed in several sections of this Report.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review the effectiveness of its GFP governance and management arrangements including the appropriate representation and formal reporting channels at College level to support effective decision-making, monitoring and action planning to improve GFP delivery.

1.3 *Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance*

IMCO has an academic affiliation with the Netherlands Maritime University; however, the GFP is not included in the scope of this affiliation.

1.4 *Operational Planning*

IMCO has institutionalized its strategic planning process through the development of an Operational Plan for every individual department that is derived from its Strategic Plan. As well as the FND operational plans, the Panel was provided with the Student Affairs Department and the Admissions and Registration Department operational plans which are developed consistently with this concept of being derived from the Strategic Plan.

The FND Operational Plan describes its goals, objectives, strategies, indicators, targets and responsibility towards improving the GFP focusing on the academic component (Portfolio, p.15). The Panel was informed that the FND Operational Plan was developed and, as it is more academically related, it was monitored by the FND Curriculum Committee which consists of academic coordinators and the HoD. The achievement of the annual FND Operational Plan objectives is communicated to the DDAA by the HoD FND and, the Panel was told that, based on this report, further actions are taken to redress areas where planning targets have not been achieved.

The Panel found that the monitoring and review of the FND Operational Plan objectives did not occur in a systematic, documented manner at the Curriculum Committee. Whilst the HoD

reported the achievements of the annual FND operational planning objectives, there was no documented action plan to redress areas where planning targets have not been achieved. Furthermore, having separate operational plans for departments providing aligned services to the FND, including Student Affairs and Admissions and Registration Departments, meant that at no point were all operational objectives related to the development of the GFP and its delivery, monitoring and review considered together effectively. This had implications for resource allocation in key areas, such as the timely provision of teaching and learning technologies and facilities, which has a negative impact on the provision of suitable study and living accommodation.

The Panel concluded that the College would benefit from aligning the operational planning systems and strengthening the collective oversight of these operational plans that impact the quality of the GFP delivery.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman align the operational planning systems of all departmental areas involved in the delivery of the GFP and strengthen the collective oversight of these plans to ensure that all operational objectives related to the development, delivery, monitoring and review of the program are achieved.

1.5 Financial Management

The financial budgeting is managed by the HoD FND and it is prepared in line with the annual operational plan. The proposed budget is discussed at College management level and forwarded to the Board of Directors for approval. Upon approval, the Finance Department manages all the financial operations of the GFP. From the interviews and the provided documentation, the Panel noted that the FND has never exceeded the budget allocated, and concluded that adequate resources are allocated to the program.

1.6 Risk Management

IMCO has established a risk management system to address the Recommendation from the 2013 OAAA Quality Audit (Portfolio, p.18). Currently the risk management system is managed and monitored by the Risk Management Committee. The FND HoD is a member of the committee in order to discuss risk matters and create mitigating measures pertaining to the GFP (Portfolio, p.17). IMCO presented a detailed Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Plan which included the risk of not formally identifying students who were at risk of failing so that intervention systems could be put in place to ensure student success. Controls include using class attendance rates to identify students at risk. The Plan is documented in a register by a designated officer for health and safety (Portfolio, p.18). The risk management system developed by IMCO is in line with ISO: 9001:2008 and the College is in the process of integrating ISO:9001: 2015 standards. The regular maintenance of fire equipment is undertaken by an external company to assure its adequacy and reliability in risk situations.

The Panel established that significant progress has been made in establishing a risk management system. The Risk Management Committee has identified academic issues as an important part of the risk management register for the GFP and preventive actions have been developed. Several preventative actions have been, or are currently being, implemented, for example, developing improved reporting on student attendance, retention and progression with the ERP software, and improved and evaluating academic advising systems. The College acknowledges the need to have an increased focus on addressing academic risk and the Panel concurs with this.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the International Maritime College Oman in establishing a risk management system and encourages the College to ensure that the system is implemented systematically and that it regularly measures its effectiveness particularly in regard to reducing the risk of students being unsuccessful in undertaking the GFP.

1.7 Monitoring and Review

IMCO stated that the GFP is reviewed between semesters by the Curriculum Committee (Portfolio, p. 18). Normal operations monitoring is also conducted at FND meetings, including, for example, academic advising systems, and the use of Moodle. The Panel was provided with various reports by external consultants and internal surveys conducted to obtain feedback from various stakeholders. Many of these surveys were conducted at the College level and not at the level of the GFP, for example, staff and student satisfaction surveys, so it was difficult to identify improvements required specifically related to aspects of the GFP delivery. The Panel observed that the analysis of these surveys relies on reporting raw data with no accompanying analysis to reflect on the data and develop appropriate initiatives or action plans. The 2016 external review of the FND highlighted the need for FND to collect fit-for-purpose evaluation data and to ensure that decisions on improvement were fed back to stakeholders. FND teachers are not fully aware of the improvements suggested by students through the module and teacher evaluations, as they are provided with an overall student satisfaction score and not the detailed summary of student suggestions for improvement.

The FND does not have documented improvement plans developed for the GFP which address recommendations from the external consultants' reports and issues identified by survey feedback from internal stakeholders. The College would benefit from developing such plans. As a result, the Panel was not able to evaluate the effectiveness of the systems that the College had in place to improve the GFP.

In order to support the monitoring and review of its GFP, the College needs to develop a more formal process to using various stakeholders' feedback, including that from external consultants, and ensure that it is systematic and monitored regularly, and inform stakeholders of improvements made to the GFP.

Recommendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman develop and implement a formal process to using various stakeholder feedback regarding the GFP; develop and implement improvement plans, monitor their impact, and communicate the outcomes of these processes to stakeholders.

1.8 Student Grievance Process

The formal grievance procedure is communicated to students through the Student Handbook. Cases are handled at both College level and departmental level (Portfolio, p.20). Students usually approach their teachers first with a grievance. If the issue is not resolved through this informal process, the students document their grievance, using a process managed by the Student Affairs Department (SAD). The Panel was presented with evidence on the implementation of the grievance procedure using this process. The SAD handles student complaints and maintains a register of cases at Foundation Level with the dedicated Foundation counsellor. The SAD records all the grievances department-wise. The Panel found that GFP students had a low level of awareness of the formal grievance procedures. While students try to complain directly to upper-

management, they are referred to the formal grievance procedure laid out in the Student Handbook. The College is encouraged to increase students' awareness of its grievance procedure and monitor its effectiveness.

1.9 Health and Safety

IMCO has a well-established health, safety and environment policy which is institutionalized through a health and safety action plan monitored by a qualified health and safety officer. The health and safety officer reports regularly to the management about any additional requirements to ensure security is maintained, and conducts awareness sessions to students and staff about health and safety aspects. The officer is also a member of the risk management committee and all risk matters are communicated formally.

There is a primary medical clinic on campus that is equipped with a full-time qualified nurse for any emergency matters (Portfolio, p.22). Coordination between the clinic and the management was clearly visible for any medical requirements needed. Most recently, an emergency ambulance was purchased by the College to transfer any urgent/serious cases to hospital.

The campus is equipped with firefighting equipment such as fire extinguishers, fire hose reels, and fire hydrants, as well as fire detection systems that are regularly checked internally and maintained by an external certified contractor to assure health and safety of students and staff. The campus, including the student accommodation, is monitored by a CCTV system that aims to act as a deterrent for potential crimes/misbehavior (Portfolio, p.22).

The College is certified by ISO9001:2008, which assesses health and safety matters as part of the compliance of the standards. The College is currently in the process of migration to ISO9001:2015 standards. Ensuring the safety of all GFP students and staff is an important priority for all HIEs. It is particularly important to establish such systems at a Maritime College due to the nature of the environment in which many of the GFP graduates and College graduates will be working. The Panel was impressed with the breadth and effectiveness of the health and safety systems which are regularly monitored, maintained and improved and in doing so provide an excellent model to GFP students regarding the importance of these systems in their future employment situations.

Commendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the International Maritime College Oman for its robust and effective systems to ensure the health and safety of both GFP students and staff on campus as well as modeling the importance of these systems in a maritime environment.

2 GFP STUDENT LEARNING

IMCO has set three goals in its Strategic Plan that address student learning in the College, these are included in the FND operational plan to provide direction in this regard. They are

Goal 2: We will implement curricula of international standards by a process of continuous review and updating

Goal 3: We will provide high quality teaching and training within a rich, stimulating learning environment.

Goal 4: We will equip students with knowledge and skills and personal attributes that will enable them to be productive and effective. (Portfolio, p.24).

This Chapter considers GFP student learning at IMCO and specifically reports on the following: GFP aims and the learning outcome standards; curriculum; entry standards and exit standards; teaching quality; assessment of student achievement; academic integrity; feedback to students on assessment; academic security and invigilation; student retention and progression; and relationships with GFP alumni.

2.1 GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes

IMCO states that its GFP is developed and designed as per the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs (Portfolio, p.2). The GFP is divided into three levels (A, B and C) and students are placed into these levels based on their performance on the placement test which is an examination of English proficiency. Level C is further divided into CA and CB for administrative convenience. Level D exists for second-semester intake students who score below 39 on the placement exam. In all other levels, students may repeat the semester. The GFP covers four areas of learning (English, Maths, Computing, and General Study Skills). Each module has its own learning objectives which explicitly state the expected skills and concepts students will attain (Portfolio, p.24).

The Panel was pleased to see the mapping of module learning objectives with program goals and objectives. The module learning outcomes are also mapped against the various assessments in the four GFP modules. The learning outcomes for all modules are well communicated and accessible to the students through the course outlines and the Student Handbook, which lists the main learning outcomes in each module in its English and Arabic versions.

IMCO's Pedagogical Framework highlights the importance of basing assessment on the module learning outcomes across the GFP. Several seminars are held to familiarize the FND teachers with the Pedagogical Framework. Staff indicate that the Pedagogical Framework assists them in designing assessment so that students at end of the semester reach learning outcomes. The Panel recognizes the potential positive contribution of the Pedagogic Framework to the sustainable improvement of the GFP curriculum. The Panel encourages the College to ensure that it is used to its full potential by ensuring that it is implemented consistently and appropriately across the GFP modules. A regular review of the framework may also contribute to its currency and relevance.

The GFP utilizes a variety of formative and summative assessments in order to determine the attainment of the learning outcomes. The English and professional and personal development competencies and skills taught in the GFP use a combination of written and practical assessment tools, including written tests, in-class writing assignments, in-class presentations, oral assessments and portfolios. The Mathematics and Computer competencies and skills also utilize a variety of summative and formative assessments.

The Panel encountered mixed views on the preparedness of GFP students for their undergraduate studies by the time they complete the program. Satisfaction surveys given to GFP alumni indicate that 60% of the alumni believe the program prepares them for Post-GFP studies, and 56% of the Year 1 teachers agreed with this conclusion (Portfolio, p.25). The Panel heard from current GFP students, GFP alumni, GFP teachers and Post GFP program teachers concerns about the students' preparedness in terms of their knowledge of maritime technical terminology and their English language competency. Discussions with various stakeholders, including GFP alumni suggested that students initially placed in Level A seem to cope better with the requirements of the Post-GFP programs than students who were placed at lower levels.

The issue of introducing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the GFP was brought up repeatedly, with the majority of the interviewees (teachers and students) suggesting that an early introduction to ESP would better prepare the students for their post-GFP studies. The same suggestion was made in the Year 1 Teachers' Survey. IMCO acknowledges that there is a gap between GFP and Diploma/ Degree programs, and has proposed that it will arrange regular meetings between the Diploma ESP coordinator and the FND Curriculum Committee to address this matter (Portfolio, p.25). English language teachers, in turn, have begun to use an English for Specific Purposes context to reshape their language in the English and Maths and Computing modules. The impact of this new approach can be seen in the research project which was introduced in this academic year and which aims to develop the learners' research and presentation skills. The Process Engineering and English teams have started to work together to update GFP modules to better prepare the students for the transition from GFP to the Process Engineering Diploma. The Panel supports these initiatives, their planned implementation and review.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the International Maritime College Oman's integration of an English for Specific Purposes context into the development and delivery of the GFP modules and encourages the College to plan and review this aspect of provision to determine its contribution to student preparedness for further studies.

2.2 Curriculum

The GFP at IMCO is a one-year program that covers the four areas of English, Maths, Computing and General Study Skills. The GFP curriculum is developed by the Curriculum Committee and approved by the FND HoD (Portfolio, p.26). IMCO states that the curriculum is benchmarked against the GFP standards of the OAAA (Portfolio, p.27). Course files for each subject area reference these GFP standards and show the module learning outcomes mapped to assessment tasks. Teaching staff confirmed their use of course outlines and the design of assessment tasks and questions to ascertain if the designated learning outcomes have been achieved.

The program is divided into three levels as discussed in Section 2.1. Students do not progress from one level to another but are all expected to pass the same/equivalent exit test and against the same marking criteria. The issue of student progression within this structure will be discussed in detail in Section 2.9.

IMCO has made a strategic decision to implement "curricula of international standards by a process of continuous review and updating" as articulated in its Strategic Goal 2 of the FND Operational Plan. This Strategic Goal is further supported by a number of objectives, strategies, measures, targets and KPIs. The Panel noted that various mechanisms are in place to achieve this strategic goal. These include regular reviews by the FND teachers of the curriculum at the end of each semester and new textbook reviews. The Curriculum Committee, which comprises academic coordinators and the HoD, plays a role in these reviews as it oversees the end of semester curriculum reviews and also oversees the preparation of assessments and examinations,

however, the minutes of the committee that were viewed by the Panel did not reflect attention to the areas in the committee's terms of reference. Through this committee, the FND is developing a process of curriculum approval.

The English module textbook selection is benchmarked against the Common European Framework (CEF) in order to ensure adequacy in relation to student levels. Teachers from the GFP as well as the post-GFP program teachers confirmed that there is ongoing interaction between the FND and other academic departments in relation to modifications to the GFP curriculum so that it better meets the requirements of these programs. Teachers of the post-GFP programs indicated that they provide feedback on the GFP graduates using a feedback form and also by directly communicating with the FND HoD.

At the end of each semester, Coordinators develop end-of-semester evaluation reports on their area (Portfolio, p.27). These feed into the more comprehensive End-of-Semester Report of the FND, prepared by the HoD, which contains feedback and review commentary on each area of the GFP, as well as recommendations for improvement. Recommendations for curriculum improvements are included in these reports including comprehensive comments regarding outcomes of the review of course materials.

Overall, it was established that IMCO curriculum is designed to reference the GFP standards of the OAAA, and assessment tasks are linked to learning outcomes. There is a formal curriculum review process in which teachers' input is sought on a number of aspects, including a review of the intended module learning objectives, teaching and assessment methods. The End-of-Semester Report of the FND is prepared by the FND Curriculum Committee and provides a comprehensive report on the department's activities and contains, amongst other things, student performance data, analysis of staff and student feedback, and recommendations for improvements to the program, including the curriculum. The Panel encourages the College to strengthen the role of the Curriculum Committee, and more formally document its deliberations, so that it has more effective oversight of the review, development and approval processes for the GFP curriculum.

2.3 *Student Entry and Exit Standards*

As mentioned earlier, IMCO administers an in-house English Placement Test which is used to place the students into one of the three GFP levels in their English modules (A, B, C) or to proceed into the Diploma/Degree programs. Level C is further divided into CA and CB for "administrative convenience" (Portfolio, p.24). Most students enter the GFP at CA or CB level. This is illustrated, for example, by the number of students taking examinations in October, 2016, where out of a total of 345 GFP students, there were 15 Level A students; 43 Level B students; 138 Level CA students; and 149 Level CB students.

Students do not progress from one level to another; rather they stay in the same level till the end of the academic year (Portfolio, p.26). The normal duration for completion of the GFP is one academic year, however, some students take longer to achieve the required exit standards. The College indicates that the maximum duration for completion is two academic years.

There is no placement or admission test for the Maths and IT modules. Instead, all students are required to take two Maths modules and two IT modules (Computer Fundamentals) regardless of their actual abilities or prior knowledge in these two areas. However, according to the Student Handbook, students who are exempted from the GFP "sit a supplementary test in Maths and IT to provide information to their academic departments concerning their skills in those subjects". IMCO also states that students who are exempted from the GFP, are "provisionally admitted to the Diploma and Degree program pending taking and passing exit exams in Maths and IT which are administered in the second semester in year one Diploma" (IMCO written reply to Matters for Clarification).

According to IMCO, students placed in Level A are “benchmarked” at approximately IELTS Band 4.5, Level B students at approximately Band 3.5-4.0, Level CA at Band 2.0 and CB below 2.0 (Portfolio, p.26). Despite their varying entry levels into the FND, upon completion of the program, students in Levels B and C are expected to be of intermediate level, which IMCO equates to IELTS Band 4.5. Students in Level A, are expected to have moved from an intermediate entry level into upper intermediate, which IMCO equates to IELTS Band 5.0. This means that the admission requirement into the Diploma/Degree Programs in relation to English language competency is not consistent for all students. Meanwhile, IMCO states that “it is expected that English language proficiency of students exiting the GFP will be roughly equivalent to a band score of 5.0 in IELTS” (Portfolio, p.29).

IMCO determines students’ language proficiency level upon completion of the GFP by administering an exit test (i.e. final exam) with the same pass marks required for all students, regardless of their entry level. The Panel did not fully explore whether there are multiple versions of this test and if so, whether these are calibrated so that comparable judgements can be made on different cohorts. The Panel was informed that all students from the three levels take the same English exit test with a passing grade of 6 out of 10 in order to enter their post-GFP programs. This approach has resulted in low pass rates for the GFP in general and the lower level students in particular (levels C, CA and CB). Analysis of the data presented in the Portfolio (pp. 41-42) shows that, for instance, the pass rate for level C in 2013-2014 was 25%, in 2014-2015, it was 33%, and in 2015-2016, it was 45% for level CA and 20% for level CB.

Despite the low pass rates in Levels B, CA and CB, only students who are in the D level, the second semester intake students, are given remedial classes. Some individual initiatives where remedial sessions were given at the discretion of teachers were reported.

Various parties confirmed that students in lower levels of the FND are disadvantaged in their Maths and IT modules, due to their limited language competency. Moreover, the Panel observed that students in Level A have a good command of English and are in general more satisfied with their studies in the GFP. Students from Levels B and C, on the other hand, had difficulties in communicating in English and were more critical of the program, particularly in terms of teaching quality and the extent to which the program prepared them for the Diploma/Degree programs. Similarly, GFP alumni who had spent more than one academic year in the FND had a rather negative perspective towards their experience in the GFP in general.

Given the low pass rates in levels B and C, the Panel strongly encourages IMCO to reconsider the current structure of the GFP, which places students into three levels with varying entry standards, and no opportunity to progress from one level to another, and yet requires similar exit expectations for all students despite their entry levels.

Recommendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review the alignment of the content and delivery of the GFP with the various entry levels and associated academic support system to ensure that students with differing abilities in English, Maths and IT can be supported to progress to the required exit standards.

The FND teachers and HoD FND have confidence in the placement test results, based on the assumption that since more students fail the GFP in the lower levels than those in Level A, the test appears to be working. The placement text uses adapted texts from the Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET) and IELTS. However, there seems to be no sound basis upon which the placement test cut-off points have been established. Instead, the test developers seem to rely on an experimental approach in this regard.

Given that there is no placement test for Maths and IT, comments have been made by GFP alumni as well as current students about the need for all students to take these modules regardless of their level upon admission. The same idea was echoed by GFP teachers as well. The lack of a placement test for the Maths and IT modules seems to place undue pressure on students who could have been exempted from these modules from the outset. Given the significance of the decisions based on proper entry and exit assessment measures, the Panel would strongly encourage IMCO to look into developing valid and reliable entry and exit tests for the GFP in all subject areas in order to establish that the GFP is fit for purpose in enabling students to successfully undertake their post-GFP studies.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman implement appropriate entry and exit assessment procedures in all GFP subject areas to establish the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for their post-GFP studies and ensure that these tests are subject to rigorous review to establish test validity and reliability.

2.4 Teaching Quality

IMCO FND aspires to “provide high quality teaching and learning within a rich, stimulating environment” (Portfolio, p.30). This aim is reflected as a goal in the FND Operational Plan. The College has established various mechanisms to ensure the quality of teaching in the GFP. This starts with the good practices the Panel observed in relation to academic staff recruitment for the FND (see Section 4.2). In addition, the faculty’s performance on the job is monitored and supported via various means. These include teacher observations by the FND HoD, peer observations, and student evaluation of teaching. IMCO states that ensuring the overall teaching quality of GFP teachers is primarily the responsibility of the HoD (Portfolio, p.31). The HoD makes unannounced classroom visits to carry out teacher observation and discusses his observations with the teacher concerned.

IMCO also employs peer observation as another means to assess and enhance the quality of teaching in the GFP. Teachers’ observations of their peers include the identification of areas of strength and reflection on their own practices. The College has put in place certain criteria for the selection of peer observers such as pairing inexperienced teachers with more experienced ones and pairing teachers with different teaching styles. Interviews conducted by the Panel, confirmed that peer observation in the FND is a practice that is appreciated by teachers.

Another source of information for the evaluation and enhancement of teaching quality is from student evaluation of modules and teachers (Portfolio, p.31). The module and teachers’ surveys are reported to be administered every semester but this has not happened for the past three semesters due to technical issues (Portfolio, p.26). This explains the fact that some students interviewed by the Panel noted that they had never filled out a teacher evaluation form. The Panel also noted that students’ feedback is not communicated to teachers in a meaningful manner. Instead, it has been observed that teachers only get an aggregated score. For teachers’ professional development, the College is encouraged to indicate to teachers what specific aspects of their performance might require further development (see Section 4.5).

The teachers’ Annual Performance Evaluation is based on input from the students, the HoD, the DDAA and teachers’ own self-assessment. A consolidated report is prepared by the HoD and approved by the DDAA (Portfolio, p.32). The Panel established that new Omani teachers, who are often recruited without prior teaching experience, are well supported in order to enhance their teaching skills (see Section 4.7).

Although the Panel did not fully explore the implementation of the IMCO's Pedagogical Framework, it is noted that the framework promotes the use of a variety of teaching methods and the implementation of a student-centred approach. The various course outlines the Panel examined and students' input confirmed that a variety of teaching methods are used. The teaching methods used in the various subject areas include peer-work, student presentations, lectures, debates, and peer teaching. Whether the variety of teaching methods used are as a direct result of the impact of the Pedagogical Framework is still to be evaluated.

The Panel heard mixed views from students about the teaching quality with some speaking favourably and others complaining of poor teaching quality and lack of empathy. As stated in Section 2.3, overall, students at Level A seemed more satisfied with the quality of teaching than those placed in lower levels.

Overall, the Panel concludes that IMCO FND has taken several measures to ensure the provision of quality teaching. However, the College needs to ensure that meaningful and diagnostic information is provided to teachers in order for them to clearly identify areas for improvement (see Section 4.5).

2.5 Academic Integrity

IMCO has an institutional Cheating and Plagiarism Policy that is widely communicated and is applicable to the GFP. Article 2.8 of IMCO Assessment Regulations clearly state what constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct in general. These regulations are published in the Student Handbook and the Student Academic Integrity Guide, which has been published recently and disseminated to students (Portfolio, p.34). IMCO has also recently published the Academic Integrity Teachers' Guide 2016-2017. These documents are comprehensive and informative. The documents discuss plagiarism and cheating in detail and cover ways of avoiding and identifying plagiarism as well as IMCO's regulations in this regard. Additionally, the students receive and sign a Letter of Undertaking that addresses plagiarism among various other aspects of student academic behaviour.

In addition to these publications, the Panel was pleased to see that efforts are made to teach students appropriate skills such as paraphrasing and referencing, as indicated in the English Module Course Outlines and confirmed by students and teachers. The Student Academic Integrity Guide also devotes several pages to illustrating various mechanisms for avoiding plagiarism, with proper exemplification. Nevertheless, during interviews with students, it transpired that Level A students seem to be more aware of what constitutes plagiarism than students in Levels B and C. IMCO acknowledges that more awareness building is needed among students in this regard (Portfolio, p.34).

Students interviewed by the Panel were aware of the IMCO regulations in relation to cheating in exams. IMCO reports that the FND has had no recorded cases of cheating in the English modules for the past four years and in Maths and IT for the past two years (Portfolio, p.34).

IMCO states that the anti-plagiarism software "Turnitin" was purchased by the College in 2012-2013 and in the future teachers will be trained in using it and students given access to it (Portfolio, p.34). The current approach to plagiarism detection seems to rely on teachers' judgement. The Panel did not fully explore this issue, but would encourage IMCO to consider utilizing the software and training FND teachers and students on using it in order to ease students' transition into their next level of study.

2.6 Assessment of Student Achievement

IMCO states that its GFP assessments and exams "are guided by OAAA Standards for GFP and are designed to determine whether the students meet the learning outcome standards" (Portfolio,

p.35). As stated in Section 2.4, the various assessments at the FND have been mapped to the GFP learning outcomes. One of IMCO's GFP Strategic Goals is to "implement curricula of international standards by a process of continuous review and updating". This goal is further supported by a number of objectives, including the objective to "ensure appropriate assessment".

Documents examined and interviews carried out by the Panel confirmed the implementation of a variety of assessment methods in all FND modules. These include weekly quizzes, mid-term exams, presentations, in-class writing, and interviews. Teachers and students confirmed the value of the weekly quizzes in aiding a focused approach to learning.

IMCO states that it carries out an analysis of continuous assessment test results in order to "provide data to help the improvement of assessment methods, credibility of marking and general teaching quality" (Portfolio, p. 36). However, documents examined in relation to results analysis indicated that the results analysis focuses on the students' performance on the test rather than on how the test itself performed. In other words, analysis is focused on the number of passes and fails rather than on the analysis of aspects such as item discrimination, item difficulty value, and test reliability. Analysis of the number of passes and fails alone does not lend itself to the achievement of the objectives IMCO has set out for this activity. While the College states that the continuous assessments and exams are prepared by the FND Curriculum Committee (Portfolio, p.38), the Examination Protocols document states that the Foundation Coordinator "proofreads and checks the level of assessments to ensure accurate gauging of levels", which also suggests that the process relies on subjective judgement, rather than a robust statistical analysis of tests. The College is encouraged to carry out a detailed analysis of test results to ensure the validity and reliability of the assessment instruments discussed above to inform effective decision-making regarding assessment practices (see Recommendation 5).

IMCO has recently carried out a benchmarking activity with two HEIs. The activity is still at its initial stages and a proper action plan with a timeframe has not been undertaken yet. The benchmarking in relation to assessment covers aspects such as internal and external moderation of exams and the volume of assessment. IMCO does not carry out external moderation of its FND exams and it has acknowledged this in the benchmarking process. The sample of an internally moderated exam provided by IMCO suggests that internal moderation is rather superficial and does not go beyond the identification of typographical and formatting issues. As for the amount of assessment carried out in the FND modules, the benchmarking report pointed out that the FND at IMCO seems to be administering too many continuous assessments and the report suggested addressing this issue. The Panel encourages the College to use the feedback from the benchmarking activity to inform improvements to the GFP.

2.7 Feedback to Students on Assessment

IMCO's Pedagogical Framework emphasizes the importance of feedback on assessment in the learning process. Similarly, IMCO's Examination Protocol requires all teachers to "provide feedback on assessment and elicit the correct answers". However, none of the stated documents provides guidelines on the timeliness and nature of feedback to students on the outcomes of their assessment. The Panel established that feedback on continuous assessment is given in class in either written format or orally.

Students reported general satisfaction with the feedback their teachers provide and that feedback on assessment is beneficial to their learning. Some students, however, raised concerns about the timeliness of the feedback on their weekly quizzes.

In relation to improvements to its current practices in this aspect, IMCO states that "newly developed surveys will be undertaken on a regular basis to measure student satisfaction", (Portfolio, p.38). However, the survey samples IMCO provided to support this intention do not relate to feedback on assessment. The Panel encourages IMCO to put in place a mechanism to

assess the effectiveness of providing feedback to students on assessment and to gauge whether it is done in a timely, effective and informative manner.

2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation

IMCO has put into place various measures to ensure academic security and stringent examination procedures. The College's approach to academic security involves developing College-wide Examination Regulations, which are communicated through the College website and published in the Student Handbook. The Examination Regulations are very comprehensive and provide detailed descriptions of issues to do with scheduling examinations, preparation of examinations, grading, invigilation and other examination protocols. The FND has produced an abridged document that summarizes the department's examination protocol.

As stated by the College, all formative assessments in the FND are prepared and moderated by the FND Curriculum Committee (Portfolio, p.38), whereas the final examinations are prepared by the academic coordinators and moderated by the department coordinator (Portfolio, p.39). The final exams require the approval of the HoD (Portfolio, p.39). The Examination Office at IMCO is responsible for printing and safeguarding test scripts as well as organizing and administering final and re-sit examinations. Invigilation protocols are clearly stated in the Student Handbook. These include procedures for handling latecomers, cases of cheating, and procedures for verifying candidates' identity.

Interviews with students confirmed that examinations are conducted under strict conditions and interviews with staff confirmed that exam papers security is maintained. As mentioned earlier, IMCO states that no cheating cases have been recorded in all GFP levels and modules for the last two years (Portfolio, p.34) and that a previous case of cheating was dealt with effectively. Overall, the College has demonstrated that it ensures that the security and integrity of assessment activities are well maintained.

2.9 Student Retention and Progression

As stated earlier, the GFP at IMCO is structured so that students study a given level of English (A, B, CA/CB) over two semesters. Students do not progress from one level to another during the academic year (Portfolio, p.40). Progression is confined to passing the GFP and moving on to the Diploma/Degree programs. Students have two re-sit opportunities and there is provision for a short summer course for students who fail the re-sit exams, having completed three or more semesters at IMCO (Portfolio, p.40).

IMCO states that "only students who satisfactorily complete the GFP in English, Maths and Computing are awarded a certificate" (Portfolio, p.40). Similarly, the Student Handbook states that "only students who pass English, Maths and IT will be eligible to join the Diploma Program".

It was clear from interviews and data requests that IMCO does not yet record and analyse progression and retention or make effective use of data to monitor progression. However, end-of-semester reports contain information on students' performance in each level. The latest end-of-semester reports submitted to the Panel (Semesters 1 and 2 of 2015/2016) contain some data on pass and failure rates, but each report presents this data in a different format, percentages are not always calculated, and there is no reflection on this data within the reports. As discussed in Section 2.3, pass rates for levels C and CA/CB are quite low.

There is no formal record of student retention data at the GFP level. The Panel also established that formal support is given to students in Level D and that for students at other levels it is left to individual initiatives from teachers in other levels, as discussed in Section 2.3.

In the light of the introduction of the new ERP system, the Panel sees potential in improving the current situation using this new system. The Panel urges IMCO to look into keeping systematic records of student retention as well as progression onto the post-GFP programs and utilizing this data to identify students-at-risk in order to address their needs in a structured manner.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman implement a structured approach to GFP student progression and retention data collection and analysis, in order to make informed decisions that enhance student learning in the program.

2.10 Relationships with GFP Alumni

The College acknowledges the value of GFP alumni feedback in improving the quality of education in the program and reports that GFP alumni maintain a good rapport with FND teachers (Portfolio, pp.42-43). However, the relationship with GFP alumni has been largely informal and focused on inviting them to various events such as the Foundation Day and Talent Show Competitions (Portfolio, p. 43).

The College has recently attempted to formalize the engagement of GFP alumni in the program. It has conducted a survey of GFP alumni (Semester 1 of 2016/2017), which elicited their feedback on various matters in relation to the program, such as the curriculum and the skills they developed in the GFP. The analysis of this survey relies on reporting raw data, as no percentages are calculated and the report presents a number of graphs; there is no accompanying analysis or action plans for improvements. The need to develop appropriate improvement plans in response to feedback data has already been addressed in Recommendation 3, Section 1.7.

Interviews with GFP alumni revealed mixed views about their experience. Level A students reported a more positive experience than students in lower levels. Students who had been placed in lower levels felt that the FND did not prepare them well for the post GFP program requirements. This matches the perceptions of current students undertaking the GFP.

Overall, the Panel encourages the College to obtain systematic feedback from GFP alumni via various channels and to ensure the inclusion of more reflective analysis, coupled with appropriate planning and monitoring of impact. The College may also consider analysing alumni feedback for each level separately in order to better reflect on the needs of students across the program and to maximize the benefit of seeking alumni input.

3 ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

IMCO provides a range of academic and student support services to GFP students to enhance learning and support successful outcomes for students. The provision of these support services is guided by IMCO's strategic goals, specifically:

Goal 3: We will provide high quality teaching and training within a rich, stimulating learning environment and aided by personalised academic support.

Goal 4: We will equip students with knowledge, skills and personal attributes that will enable them to be productive and effective.

Goal 6: We will provide appropriately constructive and professional non-academic student support services. (Strategic Plan, p.2)

This Chapter reports on the Panel findings regarding the academic and student support services including the student profile; registry; student induction; teaching and learning resources; information and communication technology services; academic advising; student learning support; student satisfaction and behavior; as well as the non-academic support services and facilities.

3.1 *Student Profile*

In 2015/16 Fall Semester there were 428 students in the GFP, with 152 or 35% females in the cohort (Portfolio, p.45). The percentage of these students placed in the various levels of the GFP were Level A, 4%; Level B, 15%; Level CA, 56%; and Level CB, 25% (Portfolio, p.47).

Data on the student profile at IMCO is handled by the Admissions and Registration Department. Most students are on internal scholarships administered by MoHE, however the College also has privately registered students, students on scholarships from local and regional companies, and international students. Until recently, IMCO was using the ProMIS system to generate student profile reports which is now replaced with the ERP system. IMCO has generated reports describing student intake by gender and entry level distribution for both Omani and international students (Portfolio, pp.46-47). This enables some degree of analysis of the student profile to assist planning for the provision of services and facilities. For example, planning accommodation facilities for both male and female students, as well as the remedial support requirements for the greater proportion of GFP students that are placed in Levels CA and CB. The new ERP system has additional functions to generate additional statistical reports to facilitate decision-making and inform system improvements.

The Panel was presented with a demonstration of the new ERP system and available functions to support generating statistical reports pertaining to student profile, progression and retention. Due to the recent change of the system, IMCO has not been able to evaluate the effectiveness of the new system nor act upon any reports generated. The College is encouraged to use the capacity and capability of the ERP to generate detailed reports on the GFP student profile to facilitate further planning and decision-making.

3.2 *Registry (Enrollment and Student Records)*

IMCO has a clear enrollment procedure that is described and communicated to students through the Student Handbook and the GFP students utilize this procedure. The enrollment is handled by the Admissions and Registration Department including the management of MoHE scholarships. At the end of each semester, the Director of Admission and Registration generates a report

detailing actions to be taken including meeting with the MoHE. The change to the ERP system is expected to reduce the time of the enrollment process, as the system has built-in functions to support the implementation of the current procedures effectively with designated authority levels. The system has various functions including recording of attendance, student records, profile and the ability to request a transcript. These functions are available for the use of students and staff. The ERP system is expected to generate reports on student progression and retention which can inform academic advising systems and the development of intervention systems to support student learning. In terms of the security of student records, there is a data backup procedure that is handled by the Director of Information Technology; the data is backed up remotely with an external contractor.

The Panel supports the efforts of IMCO to implement the ERP system to enable the improvement of the enrollment procedures, and encourages the College to implement the procedures and monitor the ERP system's effectiveness.

Affirmation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the International Maritime College Oman's introduction of the Enterprise Resource Planning system and encourages the College to expedite the implementation of its functions to enable improved admission and enrollment procedures, generate reports to inform decision-making for the GFP.

3.3 *Student Induction*

IMCO conducts an induction program the week prior to the commencement of the semester. It provides information to students about policies and procedures that are useful throughout the learning experience, included in the Student Handbook. The Dean, Student Affairs Director, HoDs and IT Manager provide a brief to the students about the learning experience in IMCO, followed by an induction on health and safety matters by the Health and Safety Officer. At this stage, IMCO conducts an induction program for all new GFP students.

The Panel heard mixed views from students regarding the induction program. Whilst the students with greater English proficiency indicated that they were well informed by the induction process, other students' level of awareness of the induction program was low. IMCO evaluates the effectiveness of the induction program through a survey. The survey is conducted for IMCO students in general and not analysed for the GFP student cohort. Students registered a high level of satisfaction with the Student Handbook, a key document used in the induction process (Portfolio, p.50, Figure 4).

The Panel concludes that IMCO has a clear induction program for the students. While it is not limited to GFP students, it does provide the students with the necessary information. The College is encouraged to continue to monitor the effectiveness of its induction program, particularly in relation to supporting the transition of GFP students.

3.4 *Teaching and Learning Resources*

IMCO has 31 classrooms and four IT labs. The FND does not have dedicated classrooms for the GFP. GFP classes are scheduled in rooms according to the timetable prepared for every semester by the College planner. The Panel noted throughout the facilities tour that the classrooms are adequate and well equipped with whiteboards and overhead projectors. In terms of IT labs, the Panel notes that the labs are adequate with the required hardware and software, and there are systems to provide technical support to students (Portfolio, p.51).

IMCO has a library headed by a Director. The library resources are annually updated through coordination with HoDs through a request list detailing the required textbooks or references for

the designated department including FND. The library reported that the total collection of the library is 1663 books, this includes English grammar, vocabulary, graded reading, Computing and Maths that are available for students and teachers for their use (Portfolio, p.51). The library references are classified according to the Library of Congress system. The library also offers additional references through e-brary, an electronic library database. The Panel confirmed that the library staff support the students and teachers with the use of e-brary.

The GFP students receive an orientation to the Library and its services during the induction program and also by their teachers. The IMCO Library User Satisfaction Survey measures the satisfaction ratings of the students on the library resources. The survey was conducted in general for all IMCO students and not specifically to GFP students (Portfolio, p.52, Figure 5) and it included student satisfaction with the space available within the library for the use of study, group discussions and a quiet zone. Sixty-six percent of students were dissatisfied with the available space.

The Panel heard that the physical resources in the library, including its space, needs consideration. Students indicated it was noisy and small which was borne out during the Panel's visit. The library is used for various activities outside its scope, such as academic advising, although the private space in the library in which to conduct academic advising activity is limited. There is no data collected specifically on the usage of the library by GFP students.

The Panel encourages IMCO to consider the students' feedback in considering improvement of its library provision, and concludes that there is a need to consider the adequacy of physical resources to support the students with the required learning environment. Conducting academic advising activities in a more suitable location needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman reconsider the adequacy of the physical library space for study activity and explore alternative locations in which to conduct academic advising sessions to assure effective learning and support the progress of students on the GFP.

3.5 Information and Communication Technology Services

IMCO has a dedicated IT Department which is responsible for the planning, installation and maintenance of all information and communication technology systems (Portfolio, p.53). The department provides staff and students with usernames and passwords, and guidance on IT services, as well as attending to the requests made by users.

The IT department consists of IT technicians that support the students and staff with any software upgrading or any further requirements (Portfolio, p.54). Most recently, the IT Department has used the software MyQ to support the students with printing facilities. Every student has an allocated number of pages to print per semester. As per the request of the students, the allocated number of pages was increased from 100 to 200 per student. The Panel heard varying views from students regarding the adequacy of the IT laboratories, some mentioning overcrowding and slow internet. With authorization from IT department, IMCO has facilitated Wi-Fi access across the campus, including the on-campus accommodation.

Within the past academic year, IMCO has started using Moodle as an online learning facility (Portfolio, p. 54). The Panel heard that Moodle is being setup and installed and GFP teachers and students will have access to it. Currently, it is not actively used by teachers or students and, therefore, evaluating its effectiveness at this stage is premature (Portfolio, p.54).

Whilst the College has surveyed student satisfaction with the Library IT equipment, the IT Department does not conduct regular surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of its facilities and services. The annual Operational Plan of the FND contains targets related to staff and student satisfaction with “equipment and software”; however, it is not clear how survey data is used to determine if these targets have been achieved. The Panel encourages the College to develop a more formal system to regularly obtain feedback from GFP staff and students on their satisfaction with the IT facilities and services to enable planned improvements to occur.

3.6 Academic Advising

Previously IMCO conducted GFP academic advising through whole class teacher-student meetings (Portfolio, p.55), on a weekly basis. This practice was focused on group advising on various aspects such as academic performance and classroom behavior. Starting from first semester 2016-2017, academic advising has been changed to individual advising. Every teacher is assigned a number of advisees. Meetings with the advisees are conducted and documented through a detailed form. In addition, for non-academic issues, a counselor has been appointed by the Student Affairs Department to handle other issues faced by students and support them further. The College intends to conduct training for academic advisors on an annual basis and the Panel supports this initiative (Portfolio, p.56).

The Panel heard that there were some issues with staff conducting confidential academic advising sessions, due to a lack of private facilities suitable for this purpose. The College would benefit from the provision of an allocated area for academic advising and counselling to enable the process to remain confidential for the GFP students, and Section 3.4 of this Report contains a recommendation in this regard. IMCO stated that a survey to measure the effectiveness of the new academic advising system will be conducted at the end of the academic year 2016-2017 (Portfolio, p.56).

The Panel supports IMCO’s efforts to enhance the academic advising system, for GFP students and encourages IMCO to ensure that the survey to determine its effectiveness is fit for purpose, and the feedback is used to inform improvements of the academic advising system.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the International Maritime College Oman’s introduction of the revised academic advising system for GFP students and agrees that the College can improve its effectiveness through a more comprehensive implementation and evaluation of this system.

3.7 GFP Student Learning Support

One of the College’s aims is to maximize GFP student learning through extra-curricular activities. There is an FND Society, run in coordination with the Student Affairs Department, that plans and conducts various extra-curricular activities for the GFP students. The Panel heard that the students with better English language proficiency had greater participation rates in the extra-curricular activities, for example during Open Day, and other activities conducted by the FND Society. Information about events is provided to students via email. The Panel heard that specific activities, such as an additional reading program where students selected a library book, read it, then carried out a presentation on the content, was initiated by the FND Society Coordinator. The Panel heard that this was monitored.

IMCO stated that it was in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of the extra-curricular activities. A survey instrument has been developed, however, the survey has not yet been implemented. The College is encouraged to expedite the process of evaluating the effectiveness of the provided activities.

Currently, IMCO identifies students' special needs at different levels, starting from the Admissions and Registration Department, Student Affairs Department and through FND staff members. Once a need is identified, it is discussed with the FND HoD and arrangements are made to support the student (Portfolio, p.57).

Regarding at-risk-students, currently classroom teachers identify these students and communicate with the student's academic advisors. Whilst IMCO has improved their academic advising system, the Panel was not able to find a clear mechanism for identifying students at risk, apart from classroom observation, so that the College could provide these students with additional support. As mentioned in Section 2.3, remedial support is provided for Level D students; however, the planned approach to interventions for students in other levels was not apparent. The Panel concludes that there is a need to develop more formal systems to identify students at risk and support their progression in the GFP.

Recommendation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review its systems to identify students at risk and ensure that interventions support their progression in the GFP.

3.8 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

IMCO relies on surveys to collect feedback from students to determine their satisfaction level with various aspects of the College's program delivery, services and facilities, including the Annual Student Satisfaction Survey (which covers a range of overall services); the semester-wise Induction Satisfaction Survey; the End of Semester Module Evaluation; and the IMCO Library User Satisfaction Survey (Portfolio, p.58). Many of these are at the College level and not specific for the GFP. For example, the surveys to measure the level of satisfaction with the library, the induction program, and overall services are at College level. The Panel heard that students were unaware of changes and improvements that had been made based on their feedback. As already discussed in Section 1.7, the Panel observed that the College did not have a systematic approach to developing, implementing and monitoring improvement plans based on these survey results (see Recommendation 3).

IMCO has a Student Consultancy Council which includes elected students who are then members of various College Committees, for example, the Academic Affairs Committee. The Panel heard that whilst, in the past, GFP students used to be members of the Student's Council (now called the Student Consultancy Council), they were now ineligible for membership, due to Ministry requirements, and that this restriction may change in the future. Students were generally unaware of the Student Council and its role. The College indicates that student input from social media is used to evaluate college services (Portfolio, p.58). However, the College is encouraged to develop and implement other approaches to ensure that the GFP student voice is heard, such as through regular meetings with this student cohort.

3.9 *Student Behaviour*

IMCO makes students aware of unacceptable student behavior, and provides them with academic misconduct procedures which are included in the Student Handbook. Every student is provided with the Student Handbook and must sign a Letter of Undertaking at the beginning of each semester which summarizes the key rules and regulations. The Panel heard that students are aware of the misconduct penalties. The registration of misconduct cases is recorded at the Student Affairs Department and the Panel was able to view samples of cases from GFP students during the audit visit. The Panel concluded that the misconduct procedures were appropriately implemented.

According to the statistics provided by IMCO (Portfolio, p.60, Figure 7), the number of cases is decreasing and the College considers this as a reflection of effectiveness of the misconduct procedures.

3.10 *Non-Academic Student Support Services and Facilities*

IMCO supports GFP students by providing accommodation, a canteen, transportation, medical services and counselling services. IMCO has a separate accommodation for males that houses 239 students (Portfolio, p.61). The two off-campus facilities accommodate 58 female students in each residence. This service is outsourced to a third party by IMCO, through a contractual agreement (Portfolio, p.61). The female accommodation is staffed with residential assistants and the male accommodation is inspected by the Health and Safety Officer. The health and safety officer conducts regular monitoring to assure safety is maintained for residents.

The canteen serves hot and cold meals. An external company is contracted to provide catering. The College contracts an external agency to provide an on-campus medical clinic for student usage which is staffed by a dedicated nurse. The College has also purchased a medical ambulance for use in emergency cases. Apart for the College canteen survey, the surveys to determine student satisfaction with non-academic services are completed by all students, so it was not possible to identify GFP student satisfaction levels by this mechanism. The College canteen survey results indicated that GFP students had a low level of satisfaction with these services. The Panel heard that student satisfaction with the catering services had not improved since this feedback. In the future, the College is encouraged to ensure that student satisfaction survey data can be disaggregated for analysis to ensure that GFP student needs are being met.

The Panel heard that students were dissatisfied with some aspects of these accommodation services including the off-campus location of housing for females, cleanliness, security, comfort and provision of study areas. Female students would prefer to live on campus and the Panel heard that they feel “banished”, although their accommodation is more comfortable, as they are in single rooms and the males have to share. The College recognizes this as an area of improvement and plans to build on-campus female accommodation (Portfolio, p.63).

The Panel concluded that the College should review its systems to obtain feedback from GFP students and develop and implement improvement plans to ensure that the College’s non-academic services and facilities meet student needs (see Section 1.7).

3.11 *External Engagement*

In order to support its external engagement with regard to the GFP, IMCO has recently (2016) established a relationship with two HEIs in Oman, Shinas College of Technology and Buraimi University College. As part of the external collaboration, IMCO has conducted a benchmarking of assessment for the GFP courses, including English and Maths with Buraimi University College. The Colleges also participate in external moderation activities.

The Panel encourages IMCO to continue to utilize the feedback from the benchmarking relationships to inform improvements to the College’s quality assurance systems and the GFP program delivery.

4 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

The provision of staff support services at IMCO are guided by two strategic goals:

Goal 7: We will provide professional development opportunities for all academic and administrative staff.

Goal 8: We will provide a healthy and positive working environment that will help staff and students to realise their full potential. (Strategic Plan, p.2).

The Quality Policy Manual and Human Resources (HR) Manual set out the institution's policies and procedures regarding the delivery of the GFP. The Quality Policy Manual documents a comprehensive range of policies, including those for staff recruitment and staff development. The Human Resources Manual complements these policies by setting out staff procedures in detail. These include, for example, the recruitment and employment of staff, the implementation of the Omanisation policy, staff training and development and the promotion of staff.

In this Chapter, staff and staff support services for the GFP at IMCO are addressed and the Panel findings are reported in relation to: its staff profile; recruitment and selection; staff induction; professional development; performance planning and review; staff organizational climate and retention; and Omanisation.

4.1 *Staff Profile*

IMCO has ensured that teaching staff represent a good range in terms of age, gender, nationality and years of experience in the field. Staff are well qualified and have a good range of skills which enable them to meet the academic and administrative requirements of the GFP. Many teaching and academic support staff such as the librarians are well qualified. Over 46% of teaching staff for the GFP have a Masters degree, and many have Masters degrees in English or TESOL. The staff profile maps well against minimum staffing requirements of the GFP standards with regards to staff qualifications and experience. All English teachers have formal English Language Teaching qualifications including CELTA. The program of training for Omani teachers who are not yet qualified supports them well (see also Section 4.7). The Panel was impressed with the good command of English of staff working on the GFP, both teachers and support staff.

4.2 *Recruitment and Selection*

IMCO has a clear staff recruitment process, as outlined in the Human Resource Manual and it has made sure that its recruitment processes reflect MoHE's guidelines for hiring staff. The recruitment process uses a good range of stages and activities to ensure that appropriate staff are recruited. For example, IMCO takes good steps at the start of the recruitment process to ensure that candidates have an appropriate level of English for speaking and writing for all GFP teachers. They are expected as part of the interview process to deliver a 30-minute demonstration lesson to assess their teaching capacity. The recruitment team follows due process during the interview process. Staff indicate their general satisfaction with the recruitment process in the Staff Satisfaction Survey, although this is the overall figure for all IMCO staff and cannot be disaggregated for FND staff. The Panel heard that, overall, staff were satisfied with the recruitment process, although they considered it a long process. The Panel concluded that the recruitment process was effective in ensuring that the GFP teaching staff have the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to meet the needs of the students.

4.3 Staff Induction

The staff induction process is in place and the induction policy is described in the HR Manual. While staff report that the induction is good in general aspects, such as Omani culture, accommodation and College facilities, recently-appointed teachers commented that they would have benefited from more specific information on the GFP course content and the levels of the students before they started teaching. The College introduced its own FND Induction Pack in response to a Recommendation in the OAAA Quality Audit Report. While satisfaction surveys identify ‘improvement from 3.3 in 2012-13 to 4.5 in 2014-5 on a five-point Likert scale’ (Portfolio, p.72), this is the overall figure for all IMCO staff and cannot be disaggregated for FND staff. Whilst the Panel found that the FND staff induction process was, in general, effective, the College is encouraged in future to collect and analyse data on staff satisfaction rates for the FND program to identify the impact of such initiatives.

4.4 Professional Development

The FND HoD is responsible for identifying areas for professional staff development and then organizing and providing professional development opportunities for staff (Portfolio, p.73). IMCO FND teachers and coordinators have access to a comprehensive in-house program of staff development, which includes general and subject-related topics, such as how to cover writing in the classroom and assessment. Omani staff also appreciate the external training opportunities that IMCO offers to those who are at the start of their careers, for example, to undertake training and achieve the CELTA qualification, and to attend conferences in Oman and abroad.

Staff development is clearly stated as a strategic goal of the College. The Panel heard, for example, that there were plans to extend opportunities for non-Omani staff to undertake further staff development. To this effect, the Panel was pleased to see the recent introduction of a budget for research which can include grant applications for staff to attend conferences and workshops. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this new initiative. While the Quality Policy Manual covers the provision for staff training well, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the in-house and external staff development program and opportunities and use the outcomes to inform further planning and provision.

4.5 Performance Planning and Review

The Strategic Plan set out IMCO’s goals for high quality of provision and professional development. Processes for the Annual Performance Evaluation of staff are in place and teaching staff are appraised on an annual basis. The HoD completes the HoD Teacher Evaluation Form and this informs the appraisal of staff.

A peer lesson observation procedure has been introduced recently, which aims to enable staff to learn from each other. The criteria for selecting peer reviewers are well defined and the strategy of pairing strong and weak teachers is aimed at the development of the latter. However, this does not yet provide sufficient scope for more advanced teachers to reflect on and develop their teaching practice further. Informed by data in the staff profile, the College may wish to extend the peer observation process to cover those who might benefit from working with each other to explore teaching and learning at a more advanced level. While the peer observations offer some very thoughtful reflection on the craft of teaching, the formal observation records presented as evidence to the Panel are insufficiently evaluative on the quality of teaching and learning. The reports would benefit from a clearer identification of what was good and not so good in lessons, from advice on how teachers might improve, and evidence of teachers’ action taken to improve. In this context, the form itself would benefit from revision to not just focus on the teaching, but to cover in more explicit detail the quality of the learning and the learning experience.

Teachers receive an Overall Evaluation Score Sheet for their Annual Performance Evaluation which provides satisfaction scores provided by students (30%); reflections by staff themselves on

self-assessment and self-evaluation (30%); HoD evaluation (30%) and Dean/DDAA evaluation (10%) . However, it is not clear to teachers how the scores are derived and what they should do to improve further, and the performance review and observation of teaching and learning reports are insufficiently specific. The Panel concluded that the current observation and performance appraisal process was not providing effective feedback to staff to inform improvements to their teaching practice, and this needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman review and strengthen its observation and performance appraisal process so that GFP teachers are clear on what they have done well and what they should do to improve their teaching practice further.

4.6 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

The Portfolio sets out in detail how IMCO intends to meet Goal 8 in its Strategic Plan to “provide a healthy and positive working environment that will help staff realise their full potential”. Staff told the Panel that they liked working at IMCO and that they enjoyed good relationships within the FND and with the staff teaching on the post-GFP programs. The Panel noted the positive team spirit amongst the teaching team and their commitment to the students and their welfare. Staff retention is also good, with a good proportion of teachers and managers on the FND program staying for many years, for example, 25 out of 32 staff have been in post for at least two years and some have been in post since 2007.

On areas for development, senior management have indicated that, funding permitting, a new block is planned to improve teaching staff office space. Nevertheless, staff do not have adequate space to prepare their lessons, and are concerned that a lack of privacy is a hindrance when giving academic advice to students.

The College is yet to address the recommendation made in the HQM FND External Review Report regarding formalizing the job descriptions of Level Coordinators. While teaching staff have job descriptions and specifications, these are not yet in place for FND level coordinators and administrative staff. This situation creates some staff resentment, as there is not a recognition of the leadership role that the coordinators adopt. The College needs to ensure all staff are aware of the scope of their duties and recognized for performing more than teaching functions.

Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman produce clear role specifications with reporting lines for GFP coordinators and administrative staff in order to recognize the roles performed by these staff.

IMCO follows up on the impact of its policies and procedures on staff and staff support services. It collects feedback from its staff on a wide range of aspects, such as the work environment and atmosphere at the College, facilities, performance review and training and support. While IMCO collects and analyses feedback from staff on a good range of aspects that affect their work, the analysis is done across the whole workforce. This is a missed opportunity that data cannot be disaggregated for the FND program and the College needs to address this so as to inform improvements to the satisfaction and working conditions of FND staff

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the International Maritime College Oman implement the collection of staff feedback so that it can identify the FND staff as a distinct cohort in order to analyse their perceptions of the program and their working conditions and use the information to formulate areas for development.

4.7 *Omanisation*

IMCO has implemented the policy requirement, in line with its own strategy, for Omani employment well: at the time of the audit, 13 of the 26 GFP teaching staff were Omanis. IMCO implements Objective 7 in its Strategic Plan on professional development opportunities particularly well for Omani teachers. They are well supported and have good opportunities to achieve teacher training qualifications such as CELTA. The interviews with Omani teachers and administrative staff showed that the command of English and the skills levels of both was high. Finally, IMCO has sought to achieve a good balance between the proportions of Omani teachers and English speakers from a variety of countries and backgrounds.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the International Maritime College Oman on the effective approach to staff recruitment, training and support which has resulted in the high percentage of Omani teaching staff who work on the GFP.

The implementation of the Omanisation program strikes a good balance between the Ministry of Manpower's requirements and the enrichment of the students' learning lives by employing a wide variety of nationalities amongst its international staff.

APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

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APPENDIX B. ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

ADRI	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.
CEF.....	Common European Framework
DDAA	Deputy Dean Academic Affairs
Deployment	The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.
ERP.....	Enterprise Resource Planning
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
External Reviewer	A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the OAAA's various external review Panels.
FND	Foundation Department
GFP.....	General Foundation Program
HEAC	Higher Education Admissions Center (www.heac.gov.om)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IMCO.....	International Maritime College Oman
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> .
MoHE.....	Ministry of Higher Education
OAAA Board.....	The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
Panel Chairperson.....	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member.....	An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
PET	Preliminary English Test
Quality Assurance.....	The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.
Quality Audit	An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision.
Quality Enhancement	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing <i>approach</i> , <i>deployment</i> and <i>results</i> .
Results	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> .
Review Director	An individual assigned to an Audit Panel by the OAAA to provide professional guidance and support.

SADStudent Affairs Department

STC.....Shipping and Transport College

SystemIn this Report, *system* refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.

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